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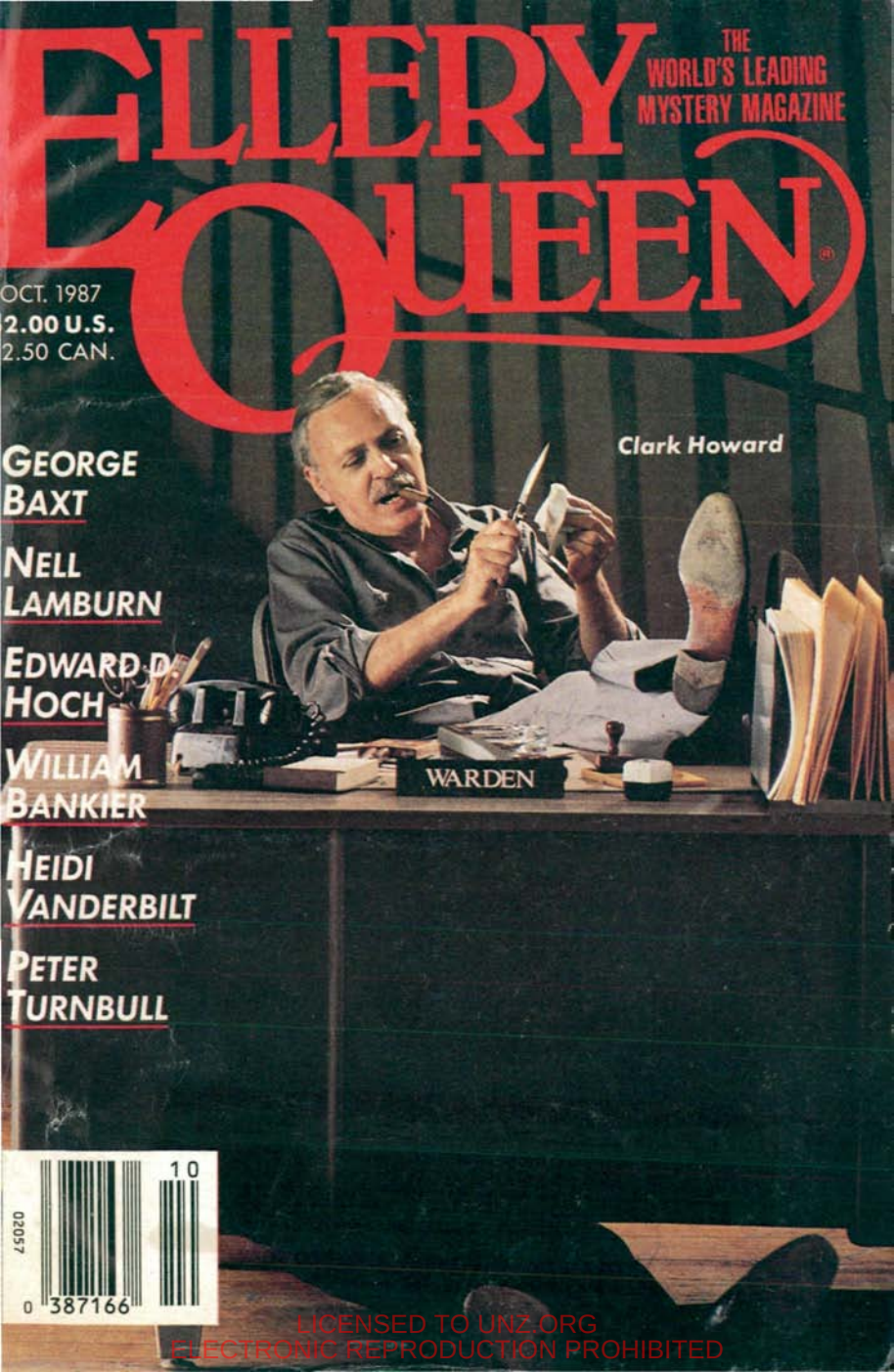

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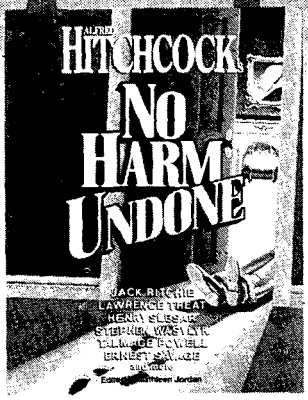

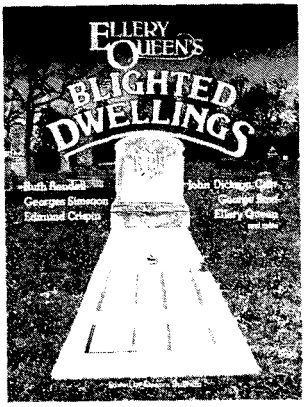

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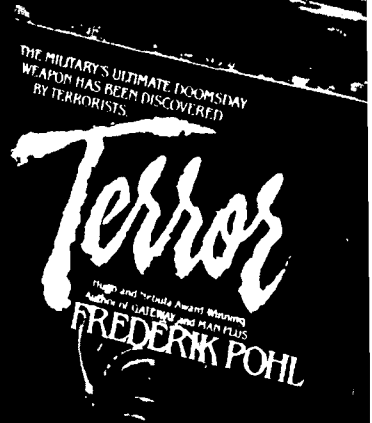
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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

There was confusion in Isobel's mind. It was as if eighteen years ago had become mixed up mentally with today and Sam was packing, pocketing his one-way ticket to London, ignoring whatever she had been trying to tell him. Her own voice echoed inside her head. You don't just go off and leave a child . . . !

SAVED FROM DEEP WATER

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"I'm leaving you in charge now, Stanley." Isobel Probert caught her son's head in the crook of her elbow and drew him down to kiss his cheek. "Anything you want me to say to Margaret?"

"Only that I love her madly and I'll see her when she gets home tonight from choir practice." Stanley Probert stood in the shop doorway managing to look vulnerable despite his size.

Isobel buckled herself into her car. "When Ginger gets back, you can go to a movie." She switched on. "If you feel like it."

"Yes mother, thank you mother." It was said with affection. Behind the plate-glass window was a portrait in oils of an elderly man seated at a table with his fists on his knees. By bending his legs and letting his head hang forward, Stanley managed to duplicate the pose. His mother drove away laughing.

It was not yet rush hour, so traffic was still light on Sherbrooke Street. Isobel took it easy, not wanting to arrive at the school before Margaret came out. It was pleasing to see Stanley on top of the world. Eighteen years ago, when his father fled Montreal and ran away to England, the boy went into a decline. Isobel had reorganized her life, putting her son at the center. She went swimming with him. She helped him build a scooter from a board and a box and two

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roller skates. She took him to baseball games as Sam used to do, but young Stanley's cheering sounded melancholy.

All things are possible, however. Now, aged twenty-eight, Stanley had been married for over a year. Married, *mirabile dictu*, to the right woman. How rare it was in this double-dealing world for such a couple to get together! And, even more marvelous to relate, Margaret had turned into an excellent companion for Isobel herself. So much for folklore about the unwelcome mother-in-law.

Margaret Mill was on her way out of the building when Isobel drove up and parked in front of Westmount High School. A student was holding the door open for her. He was probably seventeen years old, dressed in jeans and a checkered shirt, carrying an armful of books. Tiny Margaret, with her loose blonde hair and baby face, could have been his classmate instead of a teacher of English literature.

The youth escorted Margaret to the car. "This is Eddie Kindersley," she said as she climbed in and introduced Isobel. "You are looking at one of Canada's future novelists."

The boy observed Isobel with calm, curious eyes. He stood watching as the car drove away, noting colors, the slant of sunlight, and the way his teacher put as much of the front seat as possible between herself and the driver.

It took Isobel half an hour to realize something was different. They were drinking tea and eating sticky buns at a sidewalk cafe in the Old Town. Some banter had been exchanged, but the conversation had not taken off. Usually Margaret was full of gossip about fellow teachers or about neighbors in her Sherbrooke Street apartment building. Today her mind seemed to be somewhere else. She took a deep breath and got down to what had to be said.

"Isobel, listen for a minute."

"I knew there was something."

"This is awfully hard for me to say."

"Tell me."

"It's me and Stan."

"Are you pregnant?"

"Nothing like that."

"You can stop work. I can help with money." Later, Isobel would remember her pathetic misreading of the situation and would kick herself for it.

"I'm going to have to leave him," Margaret said. "It isn't working."

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After a long silence, in which Isobel sipped her tea twice, she said, "You're talking about leaving Stanley?"

"I've given it over a year."

"He's perfectly happy. You seemed happy."

"I was doing my best."

"I've watched you together. As recently as last weekend at the house in Westmount. It was all fun and games."

"Stan is a sweet boy. We have good times together."

"So?"

Margaret stared into her companion's eyes, trying to find a passageway to understanding. She saw only pain and hostility. "We're like brother and sister."

"What?"

"Forgive me, Isobel. Stan and I don't do anything in bed."

"The marriage has not been consummated?"

"Just barely. We like each other a lot. In a sense, we love each other. But he can't give himself to me. As friends, spending time together, we're okay. But being wife and husband requires more."

Isobel was struggling with her feelings. It was as if she had been hit with something wet and dirty. She was sure all the people in the cafe were waiting for her to go so they could start laughing. "What about therapy? Marriage counseling."

"He won't. I've tried."

"Does he know how you feel?"

"I haven't said I'm leaving him. But I can't go on like this."

The women walked through shops as they usually did. Margaret asked about the picture-rental business. Isobel's idea after Sam ran away was to establish a service that offered fine art for hire to homes and offices. Many a Montreal doctor's waiting room was graced by a framed oil or water-color from Probert's or Metcalfe Street. Margaret had, in fact, met Stanley when he delivered a seascape to her father's surgery.

"Time for choir practice," Isobel said around seven o'clock after they had eaten for the second time.

"You don't have to take me there."

"I always take you there. Get in the car."

On the way up the hill, Margaret said, "Can we still be friends?"

"Nothing needs to change." Isobel could not believe this was happening.

The Church of St. James the Apostle was a grey-granite interruption in Ste. Catherine Street's parade of shops and offices. It was

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Isobel's habit, when there was time, to park the car and go inside the vestry door with Margaret and wait while she collected her hymn-book from the locker containing her cassock and surplice. Isobel, never a churchgoer, enjoyed this backstage familiarity. One evening she and Margaret had followed an old baritone named Smith up winding stone steps into the bell tower. Here, he showed them the wooden handles of the carillon joined by wires to the bells overhead. And once, when she was not due home, Isobel sat in a pew and listened while the choir breezed through next Sunday's hymns and then got down to rehearsing the anthem.

This evening Isobel remained at the wheel of the car as Margaret got out. "Thanks for tea," the younger woman said. "And for supper."

"Do me a favor."

"If I can."

"Don't say anything to Stanley just yet."

"I'm leaving him. He has to be told."

"Not yet. Give it some more time. The situation may change."

"I don't see how." Margaret slammed the door. "But all right. I'll wait a little longer."

Isobel watched her daughter-in-law entering the dark building. There was confusion in her mind. It was as if eighteen years ago had become mixed up mentally with today and Sam was packing, pocketing his one-way ticket to London, ignoring whatever she had been trying to tell him. Her own voice echoed inside her head. You don't just go off and leave a child!

As she drove away from the church, an idea flashed through Isobel's mind. Margaret was not going to leave Stanley. Not in a way that would humiliate him and damage him once again as his father had done. Margaret was not going to be allowed the opportunity of telling Stanley she no longer wanted him. The alternative was wicked, but it was the lesser of two evils.

Margaret was going to die.

"What is it that makes you and Margaret such a close couple?" Isobel and Stanley were drinking morning coffee at the back of the shop.

"Sense of humor." Stanley rubbed his scalp with a knuckle. "And I think she likes looking after me."

"It's been over a year. Any sign of you two making me a granny?" She wanted some indication from him that the marriage could be-

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come okay. But in her heart of hearts, she knew Margaret was telling the truth.

"No chance." Stanley was flipping the pages of an art catalogue. "Guess who's bursting into print." He showed his mother a photograph of a balding man standing beside an angular structure of steel and glass. The caption identified the sculptor as Sam Probert of Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.

"He's gone to seed," Isobel said, glancing away. "As for his art, Detroit does it better. And you get four wheels."

In the days that followed, Isobel tried to think of an alternative to killing Margaret. There was none. If she closed the shop and moved to another town, Stanley would not come with her, he would stay with his so-called wife. If she tried to persuade him to abandon Margaret before Margaret abandoned him, he would think his old mother had gone crazy. And the defenseless boy would be driven closer to the heartless woman.

Isobel drove into the Laurentiens on an October day when the mountains were exploding with the shellfire of autumn. A fragment of poetry from her school days surfaced in her mind, where she repeated it over and over in a hypnotic rhythm.

"Along the line of smoky hills the crimson forest stands . . ."

She traveled all the way to Ste. Agathe, where she parked on a bluff looking down on Lac des Sables and the resort hotel where she, Sam, and Stanley had stayed back in the years when they were a young family practicing what a popular magazine then called "togetherness." Stanley's canoe overturned one afternoon three quarters of a mile out. Isobel saw it happen, heard his frightened cries. She ignored the orders of the rescue party who began to get out a boat—they said he was holding onto the canoe, he would be okay. Isobel heard only her eight-year-old son's anguish and she sprinted down the beach, hit the water like a hurdler, dove forward when it got deep, and did her powerful crawl, arriving at the canoe before the rescue boat.

Sam hadn't even been on the beach to witness her bravery. In those days, two years before his departure for London, he was frequently away for hours—sometimes overnight—on what he called "voyages of discovery." He would return with some piece of exotic junk in the back of the car that months later would be converted into a free-form work of art, an original Probert.

Isobel had known what was going on. She wasn't naive. Sam was

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having adventures with women, probably even the occasional farmer's daughter. She could live with it. The amours pumped him up, she understood. Wrapping him in chains wouldn't have worked, anyway—he would have arranged them on an armature, painted them, entitled the work *Of Human Bondage*, and sold it for traveling money.

In the end, he went. The overgrown boy took his son one last time to Jarry Park to root for the Expos. It was some special game—they left early and made a day of it. Then he simply moved three thousand miles away.

She had asked him out of an intense curiosity, as if she was interviewing him on the culture channel, "How can a man leave his own son?"

"He'll get over it. Besides, you can send him to visit me. The kid will have two homes. He'll love London."

Isobel made absolutely sure there would be no chance of that happening. For the first year, she cried when Stanley cried—they mourned Sam's absence as if the man had died. Then she allowed bitterness to take over. "He doesn't care what happens to us." (She destroyed the letters Sam sent from time to time.) "Don't worry, Stanley. I'm starting a business to rent out paintings. We'll survive." (Sam had left them with plenty of money and the big house free and clear.)

Sam made long-distance calls, but Isobel put a stop to that. "You only upset him by doing this. He's managing to adjust. I'm all right, I've never cared whether you're here or in Timbuktu. But have a little consideration for Stanley. Let him reorient his life."

"I've got room here at the loft. Send him over. I'll meet the plane."

"I said that to him the other time you asked. He was sick to his stomach. You haven't the vaguest notion what your boy is like."

The October sun went down early behind the Laurentien hills. Isobel drove back to Montreal. Soon it would be winter, the leaves would fall. Naked, grey limbs would be left in place of today's transient beauty. And there was no alternative to killing Margaret. She had only to decide how to do it. She already knew where and when.

Margaret was surprised to find Isobel waiting outside the school at four o'clock on Thursday afternoon. Nothing definite had been said but she had assumed the gossipy tete-a-tetes were a thing of the past.

As usual, young Eddie Kindersley held open the door for her,

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practicing courtly manners as would characters in the novels Margaret believed her prize student would write one day. They both saw Isobel shifting a large portfolio from the front passenger seat of her car into the back seat. Then she turned to greet them with her brightest smile.

"Don't you love Indian summer? I hate to waste these precious afternoons. Come along, Margaret—le Vieux Montreal is waiting."

As the car drove away with the apparently carefree women inside, Eddie stood staring after it. He looked as if he had just bitten down on something he could not identify. Taking a pen out of his shirt pocket, he flipped open one of the notebooks he was carrying and began to scribble.

It was dark when Isobel drove up and parked outside the Church of St. James the Apostle. She said as she got out, lugging the bulky portfolio with her, "I don't dare leave this in the car."

"Are you staying for the practice?"

"I thought I would. And then I'll see you home."

Holding open the vestry door so that Isobel could lug the portfolio through, Margaret said, "Have you got the crown jewels in there?"

"Near as never mind." The portfolio measured four feet by three feet, zippered on three sides, and had a handle on top. "Usually it carries sketches. Right now I have one of my husband's early mock-ups in here. Iron and mahogany."

"May I see it?"

"Perhaps. Yes, I think I'll show it to you."

The choir was singing inside the church as the two women went into the vestry. Practice began sharp at seven-thirty. Isobel had extended dinner deliberately to bring them here at a quarter to eight. As Margaret opened her locker and took out her hymn-book, Isobel unzipped the portfolio.

"Finally I'll see your husband's work," Margaret said.

"Not exactly." Isobel took out a baseball bat, let the portfolio fall aside, and gripped the bat in both hands the way she had practiced at home.

Margaret started laughing. Here was this sophisticated middle-aged lady, beautifully dressed right down to her stylish gloves, and she was hefting a baseball bat. "Isobel, what are you doing?"

"I considered the iron-and-mahogany sculpture, but it would have been traced to me."

"I don't understand."

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"You will. Look inside your locker."

Margaret turned to the open locker and Isobel brought the bat full swing against the back of her head. Margaret's knees buckled and she sank to the floor face down. Isobel braced herself and brought the bat down on her skull again and again.

The choir was still singing as she carried the bat in one hand, her portfolio in the other, and hurried up the winding stone steps to the bell tower. She left the bat on the floor and moved carefully back down the stairs. The murder weapon's location might or might not implicate the old baritone who rang the bells. Isobel was not interested. It would give the police a false trail to explore. It would somehow link the murder to the church.

She, meanwhile, had an alibi. It was partly established already. Stanley had a date to meet her outside the Odeon Cinema at 7:15. If either one was not on time, the other would go inside and take up their accustomed position in the front row. They saw movies this way frequently. Tomorrow, when the news of Margaret's murder was broadcast on morning radio and television, she would speak to Stanley and make her alibi complete.

Now she ran to the car, stowed the portfolio in the front seat, took off her gloves, and put them in her purse. Then she lifted the hood and played with the carburetor enough to get some grease on her fingers. She wiped her hands on her skirt, slammed down the hood, got inside the car, and drove to the Odeon.

"Trouble with the car," she whispered to Stanley as she eased into her seat with the silver screen in front of them. "What have I missed?"

"The nuclear reactor is about to melt through the floor," Stanley said, passing her the giant tub still half full of popcorn.

After the film, Isobel adhered to the normal routine, which called for her to feed her son a sandwich at Ben's Deli Restaurant. Then, around ten o'clock, he headed back on foot to his nearby Sherbrooke Street apartment while she drove home to Westmount. On the way, she stopped for a browse in a second-hand bookstore. The telephone was ringing as she let herself into the house.

"Mother, the police were here! Margaret is dead! She was murdered at choir practice!"

Isobel listened to the story. He sounded panicky, which was understandable. This was the miserable side of the action she had been forced to take. She said, "Come here, dear. Don't stay in the apartment alone tonight."

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When he arrived in a taxi twenty minutes later, she had a couple of hot toddies ready. The night had turned chilly. With a blaze of maple slabs in the fireplace warming the library, they sat together discussing the disaster. Stanley seemed to be in shock. He kept going over the police interview. "I got the feeling the detective thinks I may have killed her."

"That's absurd. You were at the movie with me."

"Still, I got this feeling."

"By the way, we'd better agree on something. The police will be talking to me sooner or later. I delivered Margaret to the church, then I drove on to meet you. But I had engine trouble, so I arrived around eight and you were already inside."

"So?"

"Nobody I know saw me messing with the car. I can't prove the engine broke down."

"Your dress had grease on it."

"Which I could have put there on purpose. If this detective is as suspicious as you say he is, let's not give him anything to think about. I showed up at seven-fifteen and we went in and saw the movie."

"I don't see why you can't simply say—"

"Stanley, do as I tell you," she said sharply and he blinked and lowered his face to his cup. It was like old times.

Three days passed before Detective-Sergeant Lucien Lacombe arrived at the house to interview Isobel Probert. He was slim but pot-bellied, like an athlete going to seed. A black moustache and tinted glasses made him appear shy. She offered coffee but he would accept only a glass of water, which he drank in one long swallow.

"I'm trying to lose weight," he explained. "You keep yourself filled up with water so you don't get hungry for food."

Isobel answered Lacombe's questions about Thursday—her meeting Margaret at the school, their session in the Old Town, the drive back to the church for choir practice.

"Did you see anybody else when you went inside the church?"

"I didn't go in. I drove on to the Odeon Cinema to meet Stanley."

"Yes, I got all that from him." The detective set his notebook aside. He took off his glasses and wiped the lenses on the broad part of his necktie. He observed Isobel with pale eyes that conveyed a mixture of sympathy and suspicion. "I would expect you to protect your son," he said.

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"I beg your pardon?"

"I think you went to the Odeon but Stanley was not there. He came to the church and met his wife. Perhaps he arranged the meeting in advance. The choir began practicing at 7:30 but the deceased was not present. She must have come in after that time with her husband. They had been arguing. He attacked her, killed her, then hid the weapon in the bell tower. Then he left the church and went to meet you at the cinema."

"That's nonsense. I swear to God, Stanley was at the Odeon at seven-fifteen. Besides, he had no reason to kill Margaret."

"Husbands and wives do bad things to each other. In my business, we see it all the time. The insurance provides a motive."

"Insurance?"

"Your son took out a policy on his wife's life a couple of months ago. Two hundred thousand dollars."

"I know nothing about that. But it seems circumstantial to me. Married couples insure each other all the time."

"Yes, but it is a motive. And when I take that along with the murder weapon, I have a case against your son."

"What was the weapon?"

"A baseball bat."

Isobel managed to appear surprised and then bored. "Isn't one baseball bat much like another? Unless—" She allowed some concern to show. "Did you find fingerprints?" She had wiped the bat clean and had worn gloves.

"Something better than prints. The Expos had a special promotion at Jarry Park a long time ago. Eighteen years, I think. They gave away a bat to the first thousand boys who attended that game with their fathers. The bats are numbered and the name and address of each boy was registered with the club. In twenty years—two years from now—they plan a banquet for the kids who were at that game. It's a publicity stunt."

Isobel was devastated. "I don't believe it."

"So you can stop lying about the movie, Mrs. Probert, and tell me the truth.

"Talk to him again, Sergeant. I swear to you, Stanley did not kill Margaret."

"I want to talk to him. I was hoping you could help me." Lacombe tipped the empty glass to his lips and caught the last drop of water. "Your son has gone away. The building superintendent saw him getting in a cab this morning with three pieces of luggage . . ."

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Isobel was frantic. She had been able to forestall Margaret's desertion of her son. But now Stanley was in worse trouble. Lacombe had obviously been rough on him. And, admittedly, there was circumstantial evidence. When she chose the murder weapon, she had deliberately avoided various heavy objects in Sam's studio because they might have been traced. An old baseball bat, she had decided when she came across it in the game-room, was only an old baseball bat. How could she have known it was registered in Stanley's name? It was Sam's fault, the devious bastard, for taking the boy to that particular game in the first place.

The insurance was something she could check. She telephoned the agent who wrote coverage for the entire Probert family. He confirmed that he had sold Stanley policies for himself and his wife. Would he be willing to tell Sergeant Lacombe that the policy on Margaret had been the agent's idea?

"I can't do that. Stan and Margaret came to me with their minds made up. They wanted to be equally insured."

In the days that followed, Isobel stayed home, leaving the running of the shop to her partner, Ginger. She was convinced that Stanley's absence was temporary. He would reappear soon, hurrying up the walk, pushing open the front door so that it banged and she would have to scold him for being inconsiderate. Whatever the evidence, the police could not find him guilty for the simple reason that he had not committed the crime. Innocent people did not end up in jail.

Anyway, Margaret Mill was the guilty party if you took the moral view. She had been planning to destroy Stanley's happiness over an issue that was not at all that important. Many a woman remained married to a decent man whether their sex life was satisfactory or not. She could have taken a lover and kept it a secret and spared Stanley's feelings. But no—the self-centered bitch had been interested only in taking the quickest way out.

The telephone rang in the middle of the afternoon, ten days after the murder. Inspector Lacombe was on the line, telling Isobel that her son had been located. "I thought you would want to know he is safe. Scotland Yard responded to our bulletin. He is staying with his father in Chelsea."

"How nice for them."

Lacombe heard the hostility in the woman's voice. "You told me Stanley's father was dead."

"He is, as far as I'm concerned."

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The detective let that pass. "My choice now is either to go to London and bring him back or to have Scotland Yard arrest him and send him home under escort."

"Obviously, you'll do as you like."

"You could call him and talk to him, Mrs. Probert. Persuade him to come home and turn himself in. Say we only want to hear his story."

"I won't do that," Isobel said. "If he's decided to throw in his lot with that no-good adulterer, I wash my hands of the pair of them."

When Lacombe put down the telephone he was told there was somebody waiting to see him. A teenaged boy was sent in, but not one of the troublemakers the police had to deal with at concerts. This lad was grown up already, in his dress and in his attitude. From the expression in his eyes, you could tell he was concerned with what was going on in the real world.

"My name is Eddie Kindersley," he said. "I'm a student at Westmount High. Margaret Mill was my English teacher. Margaret Probert. She kept her maiden name at school."

"Sit down. What is it?"

"I know the police only care about evidence, and this isn't evidence." The boy took a folded sheet of paper out of his pocket. "But I'm convinced there was something going on that final day."

"I'm interested."

"Mrs. Probert showed up most Thursdays at four o'clock in her car. She and Miss Mill would go someplace. I got used to seeing them leave together. They were always happy, like a pair of kids heading off to have fun."

"Keep talking."

"I had to write it down. I'm a writer."

Lacombe was impressed by the boy's confidence. He did not say he was "going to be" a writer.

"What did you write down?"

Handing over the paper, Kindersley said, "This is very short. A vignette. It describes the change in Mrs. Probert. I wrote it down because it interested me—as an observer of people. But when Miss Mill was killed that evening, I started thinking. Finally I decided the police might be interested, too."

It was a paper torn from an exercise book with blue lines ruled in it and ragged holes down one side where it had been ripped from its spiral binding. The vignette filled less than half a page. Lacombe read it aloud.

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"Mrs. Probert is under pressure. Mrs. Probert is in disguise. This wealthy woman gets out of her car and advances on Margaret like a rooster in a cockpit. What has happened? Usually their meeting is suffused with a sense of freedom, of work all done, of games to be played. Today the older woman has something heavy on her mind. And she can't quite hide it. God is my witness, she hates my teacher. And I never noticed it before. Margaret does not see it now because Mrs. Probert recovers her poise and masks her true feelings under a cloak of courtesy. Deftly, she lifts the giant portfolio from front seat to back. Both climb into the car. They drive away."

Hearing the detective read his prose had not been unpleasant for Eddie Kindersley. His face was slightly flushed as he said, "I wrote that when it happened. Next day we heard Miss Mill had been murdered. I've been wondering whether to tell what I know. Actually, I don't know anything. It's just a suspicion."

"You've been a great help. I'll keep this if I may. We know who the killer is. He left the country and we're arranging to have him brought back. This observation of yours confirms a suspicion of my own. Mrs. Probert is an accessory before the fact."

They would not let Isobel see Stanley when he was escorted back to Montreal in the custody of an officer. She felt they were being kept apart deliberately and she said as much to Detective-Sergeant Lacombe when he came to the shop in Metcalfe Street to interview her again. Seeing her surrounded by paintings in elegant frames, he was surprised to note how her appearance had deteriorated. Her hair needed setting. The polish on her fingernails was cracking. She looked as if she had lost weight.

"This case is so simple," Lacombe said. "So obvious. Why not clear the whole thing up here and now? We can save the prosecution a lot of time." He took from his pocket a page torn from an exercise book. "Which might then be reflected in your son's sentence."

"You're wrong," Isobel said. "Wrong, wrong, wrong. Stanley did not murder Margaret."

"He took out a ton of insurance on her."

"They insured each other."

"And used his own personal baseball bat. The Expos organization has it registered in Stanley Probert's name."

"You miss the point. Only a stranger would have used that bat as a weapon. Not Stanley. He knew it as good as had his name on it. He'd have to be crazy."

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"I think he is, Mrs. Probert. You should have heard him."

"Heard what?"

"The way he was tearing up that cell. Raving. I'm surprised the noise isn't reaching us up here."

Isobel went silent. Lacombe chose that moment to hand her the page of paper. "This is self-explanatory. It was written by a boy named Kindersley, a student at Westmount High. I think you've met him. He certainly knows you." As she read the description of herself on that day, Lacombe said, "You knew there was trouble between your son and his wife. You probably saw the murder coming. For all I know, you're glad he killed her."

Lacombe watched Mrs. Probert closely. She had finished reading. She might have been listening for distress signals all the way from the distant holding cell. But the distraught woman was hearing something else from even farther away. On a beach beside a Laurentien lake on a summer afternoon, she was responding to the cries of a boy in deep water.

"My God," she whispered, "what have I done?"

"That's what I'm trying to get clear," Lacombe said. "You must have waited at the Odeon for Stanley to arrive. When he did, it was clear he'd been up to something. You questioned him and he confessed to you and—it's understandable for a mother—you tried to conceal the crime."

"Other way around," Isobel said. She had to rescue Stanley as quickly as possible. He was drowning. "I killed Margaret. She was going to run off and leave him. Exactly the way his despicable father ran out on him. Ran out on *me!*"

Lacombe was having difficulty making the mental adjustment. "You, Mrs. Probert? Going around town with a baseball bat?"

She handed back Kindersley's page, underlining with her fingertip the line that said, "Deftly, she lifts the giant portfolio from front seat to back."

The detective began to smile. He could not help it. He was reflecting the expression of relief on the tired old woman's face.

"Q"

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a ***NEW*** short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"The orange sellers will do a healthy business and there'll be peel flying about," warned Nathaniel Rigby, gesticulating wildly with his green clay pipe.

"I will hear no more of this!" cried Shakespeare. "You pierce my heart with your words!"

"And you pierce our purses with yours! Eight hours! Do you know what that will cost us in overtime?"

Shakespeare began tearing at his hair. "Where is Burbage? He is the star! He revels in my words! Why is he not here to help defend me against these philistines?"

Sir Ogden drew himself up haughtily. "I am not a philistine. I am Church of England."

A hearty and wonderful spoof from George Baxt, former theatrical agent as well as writer for the theater, whose sense of stage history serves us well here, whose The Dorothy Parker Murder Case *and* The Alfred Hitchcock Murder Case *are both thriving, and whose* The Tallulah Bankhead Murder Case *will be published by St. Martin's this fall . . .*

THE WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE MURDER CASE

by GEORGE BAXT

Sixteen hundred and one was not a vintage year for the theater in London. The comedies were more vulgar than ever, attributed to this era of permissiveness. The melodramas were grislier and bloodier than the previous season, when even the most faithful of

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patrons took to booing and hissing and catcalling and throwing rotten vegetables, of which there was always an overabundance. The pageants and the pantomimes were growing longer and duller and it was a current joke that physicians with patients troubled by sleepless nights were recommending an evening at the theater as a remedy.

But all was not yet lost. There was one small hope. Master Will Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

"I hear they are having fourth-act trouble," one gentleman in a tavern whispered to another.

Still another said, "I am told there is trouble with young Rutherford."

"Rutherford? But he was such a touching Juliet!"

"Aye, but now he plays, I am told, a character called Ophelia. It is a role in which he must grow mad and drown himself in a pool of water."

"Rutherford? But it is known he never goes near water!"

"That's not the half of it," said another gossip. "At yesterday's rehearsal, the play ran for close to eight hours."

"*Eight* hours! But surely it will be cut!"

"Master Will does not allow it. You know playwrights."

"Actually, I don't, and I'm told I'm all the more fortunate for it."

Will Shakespeare was onstage at the Globe Theatre, glaring at the three men seated on a bench in the pit smoking clay pipes of various colors. To think, thought Shakespeare, to think those were my Christmas gifts. "I will not cut a line!" he shouted.

Matthew Miller leapt to his feet, took his purple pipe from his frothing mouth, and bellowed, "As the representative of the Lord Chamberlain, your benefactor—"

"It is Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth who is my benefactor!"

"And the Lord Chamberlain speaks for Her Exalted Majesty and I speak for the Lord Chamberlain!"

"So you admit you are a ventriloquist's dummy!"

"Apologize at once or *Hamlet* shall never open!"

Sir Ogden Willoughby arose and put an arm around Miller's shoulder, almost blinding him with his orange pipe, which he now remembered to remove from his mouth. "Come now, Miller, let cooler heads prevail."

"He does nothing but insult me and taunt me with jibes. I who

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supported him when everyone wished to cancel his *Titus Andronicus!*"

Sir Ogden sighed. "We certainly lost a bundle on that one. Gad, cutting off the heroine's hands—I shudder at the memory. Now, Willie—"

Here it comes, Shakespeare thought, he's calling me Willie. It will be the gallows next.

"Dear Willie, we are all pulling together for a success. London is sorely in need of a good drama."

"*Hamlet* is a *great* drama!" shouted Shakespeare in a rare display of egotism.

"That is for history to decide, Willie. But the fact remains, at eight hours, *Hamlet* is no longer a play, it is an ordeal. You saw yourself at yesterday's rehearsal how our audience paid little heed to the dramatics after the first two hours."

"It was a benefit!"

It was the turn of Nathaniel Rigby to rise to his feet, gesticulating wildly with his green pipe. "You must listen to reason, Shakespeare! Those monologues have got to go!"

"Never!"

"By the great lord Harry, they must! I mean, for crying out loud, man, 'To be or not to be'! Who gives a damn! And 'That this too, too solid flesh would melt!' or whatever the hell the words are. They're stage waits! The orange sellers will do a healthy business and there'll be peel flying about."

"I will hear no more of this! You pierce my heart with your words!"

"And you pierce our purses with yours! Eight hours! Do you know what that will cost us in overtime?"

Shakespeare began tearing at his hair. "Where is Burbage? He is the star! He revels in my words! Why is he not here to help defend me against these philistines?"

Sir Ogden drew himself up haughtily. "I am not a philistine. I am Church of England."

Roger Lansing, the stage manager, hurried onstage. "Burbage is at the Boar's Head Inn tearing a pigeon to tatters."

"Fetch him, damn it! Fetch him at once! And while you're there, bring me a ham on whole wheat and a tankard of beer."

Young Rutherford sat before a dressing-room mirror trying on a variety of wigs. He couldn't decide which would best suit the character of Ophelia. The one he favored he had already worn in *As You*

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Like It and he knew the bitches in the audience would recognize it and make loud comments. He thought to himself with a sigh, How difficult are London audiences, they begrudge a boy his livelihood. And soon, very soon (he was studying his face in the mirror), he would be too old to play ingenues. What next? The nurse in *Romeo and Juliet?* Oh, what the hell, she had the funniest lines. He caught the reflection of Olivia Lansing in the mirror, standing in the doorway. She was the stage manager's sister.

"Why do you smirk, mistress Olivia? Do I somehow displease you?"

Hands on hips, the slim young beauty with the unwashed hair sashayed into the room. "All men impersonating women displease me."

"Then you suffer centuries of displeasure."

"Someday, my young bucko growing older before my eyes, women will take their rightful place in the theater. There will be an end to this disgraceful discrimination."

"Not in our time, mistress. There will be no progress this century."

"Are you also a soothsayer, master Rutherford?"

"I rarely sooth, but I often say. How do you like this wig?"

"It makes you look too Danish."

A swarthy and unkempt man, hat in hand, was led to William Shakespeare by one of the theater assistants. "Master Will, this person says he has a message for you."

Shakespeare glared at the slob. "Well? Out with it."

"It's your wife, sir."

"My wife? What wife? Oh, you mean Anne Hathaway. You come all the way from Stratford-on-Avon?"

"No, sir," said the man with a hearty laugh that made all assembled avert their faces, "she is at the Prawn and Pullet. She just got off the afternoon stagecoach."

Shakespeare shook a fist. "Is there never to be any peace for me? What brings the accursed wench to London? I told her to stay home until I read the reviews!"

"She said if you don't come to her, she will come to you."

"Od bodkins and fie! This is what I get for marrying a Hathaway, a slut descended from a long line of shirt manufacturers!" Will turned to his three antagonists and shouted, "My wife's in town!" They groaned. "I must away to her at once. But I beg you remain until I return and then we shall settle the matter!"

As Shakespeare fled, Sir Ogden said to his two allies, "Face it,

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gentlemen, Shakespeare's slipping. 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.' Oh, boy, won't the libraries love that one?"

In her room at the Prawn and Pullet, Anne Hathaway rummaged in her carpetbag. She unpacked swiftly. A bodice, a jerkin, her second-best frock, a hastily wrapped half-eaten leg of mutton, and a lethal-looking snee. Her husband burst into the room as she held the snee in her hand.

"Is that a snee I see?" asked Shakespeare suavely, assuming the manner of a man of the world, any world.

"It is a family heirloom. I carry it everywhere, you know that."

"No, I don't. You never go anywhere. Why are you here? Why have you chosen to displeasure me again?"

She reached for her handbag. From it she withdrew a slightly tattered book leaf. Shakespeare recognized her fingermarks. Mutton grease. They were all over the walls and furniture and their three children back in the thatched-roof cottage in Stratford-on-Avon. She waved the paper under his nose. "Who is she?"

"Who is who?"

"The Dark Lady, you cheating son of a bitch!"

"I know no Ethiopes save my own *Othello*, and he is fiction—along with your jealousies."

"Who is the Dark Lady of this sonnet, Will? I demand you tell me! It is obviously written to some person of whom you are enamored!"

He glowered. "It is good to see your grammar has improved, wife. Now if we could only do something about the way you suck on your teeth."

"Don't you change the subject!"

"I wish I could change the wife."

"So you choose to insult me. Who is my rival for your affections? Who is the hyena? Is it Lansing's sister Olivia? Is it she? I am told she fawns over you like a cocker spaniel in heat."

"If she does, it is not for a position in my bedroom. She wishes to act on the stage. A fanciful notion but quite ridiculous."

She clutched her chest. "Oh, my God!"

"Heartburn?"

"The actors in your plays who portray the women—is it one of them? Is it, Will? Is it one of them who is your Dark Lady?"

"This is ridiculous. This scene is totally unplayable—thank heaven it will never be attributed to me. I must return to the theater

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at once. And you, madam, I pray you return to Stratford and our three dear little kiddies."

"Hypocrite. You can't stand the sight of them."

He pointed an index finger at her with a stern look on his face. "Be gone, madam, to my second best bed!"

"You're repeating yourself!" she shouted as he slammed the door behind him.

She raged about the room and then came to a decision. She placed the snee in her handbag and left the room.

In the cellar of the Globe Theatre, Olivia Lansing paced back and forth in the dimly lit place (one solitary candle was all the theater allowed in the budget) while her brother Roger attempted to placate her violent person. She wiped spittle from the corners of her mouth with one hand and tears from the corners of her eyes with the other. "Olivia, Olivia, make peace with yourself. They will never allow you to act in this company or any other company in the queendom. Such a revolution will never take place in our time! Wed yourself to Anthony Bedgood. True, he is elderly but he is wealthy and heir to an even greater fortune."

"I thought you despised him. You have urged me to marry some other heir, one younger and more to your liking."

"No, no, no—I have changed my mind! Don't change an heir for me!"

"You are such a fool, Roger. You have seen me act in the privacy of our tatterdemalion shack in the meanest district of the city. You have told me I am brilliance itself!"

"Indeed, I will never go back on that opinion, for we both know I am one of those most hopeless and idiotic of persons, an honest man."

"It is I who should be playing Ophelia, not young Rutherford. Young—ha! I'll wager you he is almost one and twenty if not a year more and he *looks* it. Do you see the lines about his mouth?"

"I am told they are from laughter."

"There's nothing funny about *Hamlet,* brother!"

Richard Burbage, the great star of the theater who was intent on making his greatest triumph as the prince of Denmark, said to young Rutherford as they stood face to face in the wings of the theater, "I warn you for the last time, laddie, if you once again try to queer it when I say 'Get thee to a nunnery,' I shall stick you with a dirk!"

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Young Rutherford folded his arms, tapped one foot ominously, narrowed his eyes, which had never been his best feature as they were grown too closely together, and responded, "You fat oaf!" Burbage reddened. "You boar without tusks. You boneless ham. You toothless beaver—"

"Go on." Burbage's eyes flashed murder.

"Thank you, I shall." He took a breath and continued. "You tasteless suet pudding. You—"

Shakespeare entered out of breath as Olivia Lansing and her brother emerged from the cellar, Olivia holding the candle, tallow dripping on her flowing skirt.

Sir Ogden asked charitably, "Well, Will, what of your wife?"

Shakespeare flipped his wrist with disdain and said, "Leave her to heaven. —Burbage! Burbage, have you heard? These three clay-pipe smokers wish to assassinate us. They wish to cut your monologues!"

"Fie and away with them!" cried Burbage at his fruitiest. "What knaves and scoundrels would so unhand us? Who are these servants of Satan who plague us with the scourge of stupidity? Cut the monologues? I'd sooner cut— Well, on second thought—"

No one saw Anne Hathaway slip into the theater. She hid behind a convenient curtain until she saw young Rutherford flap his hands in disgust and return to the dressing room. Then she hurried after him, shut the door, and leaned against it.

"Well, madam? And what, pray, may I do for you?"

"You know who I am."

"From your heaving chest, I assume you are a wronged wife."

"This has got to stop!"

"What nonsense you speak. The show must go on!"

"I am talking about the way you inspire Will to write these love sonnets. They must stop!"

"Could you cause the tides to go in but one direction? A waterfall to flow upstream?"

"Oh, shut up and listen to me!" She was rummaging in her handbag and swiftly menaced him with the snee. "Do you know what this is?"

"A foul-looking appendage."

"Its thrust is fatal. I have a keen hand with a snee."

"I have no reason to doubt you. But mind, madam, if you dispatch me with dispatch, there will be no performance. I am the only actor who has committed Ophelia's lines to memory. There was no money

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to hire someone to study under me. This production is being produced on what in ancient Greece they called a shoestring. Cut off my life and you cut off your income. I know master Shakespeare's financial condition—all England knows it. So I beg you, madam, take leave of your senses if you will, but while you're at it also take leave of me."

He was at her side and opened the door. The two fell in the line of vision of Olivia and Roger Lansing, who saw Anne replace the snee in her handbag.

As she left the dressing room, she said viciously over her shoulder to Rutherford, "I hope you fall flat on your face."

He slammed the door shut and she moved to a bench—and, sitting, she placed her handbag on a table beside her and covered her face with her hands.

Onstage, Nathaniel Rigby waved his green pipe and shouted, "Very well, you two rapscallions, have it your way! But mark my words, this is the last the world will ever hear of your accursed prince!"

Shakespeare snorted. "That's what you said about my *Henry the Fifth*, and there are six companies of that touring the hinterlands and the continent—albeit it is getting mixed notices in France." He sighed the sigh of a very tired man. "All Gaul is divided. Let us go on with the rehearsal!" He clapped his hands. "We shall turn now to Ophelia's mad scene." He said in an aside to Burbage, "We must find a way to prevent Rutherford getting indigestion from chewing the scenery." He shouted, "Where is Rutherford? Time diminishes rapidly or something like that. I seem to lack for memorable quotes today. It has been such a terrible day."

Someone screamed. "He is dead! Young Rutherford is dead! There is a snee in his heart!"

"A snee," echoed Shakespeare, sounding like the ghost of Hamlet's father.

All converged at the door to Rutherford's dressing room. He was lying flat on his back, arms outstretched, eyes lifeless as the rest of him, the hilt of the snee indeed protruding from his person where one might accurately suppose the heart was placed. Shakespeare knelt and recognized his wife's snee. "Oh, my God, what hath this Hathaway wrought? What treachery is committed in the despicable name of jealousy? My wife! My wife! A kingdom for my wife!"

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Anne entered of her own volition. She recognized the accusation in her husband's eyes.

"I did not perform this foul deed," she said in a husky voice. "I swear upon our children's heads."

"Sure, you do," said her husband with an unbecoming sneer. "With them out of the way, you would have more time to entertain your petty jealousies."

"I did not murder him. I admit I threatened him, but I did not murder him. An alien hand stole the weapon from my handbag while I sat on yonder bench."

She flung a thumb over her shoulder in the general direction of the bench. "I swear this, Will. On another's body rests the burden of the guilt."

"Oh, fie," shouted Richard Burbage, "the catastrophe is even worse than one can imagine! Will! Will! Who now is to play Ophelia?"

Shakespeare gasped and clutched his chest.

"Heartburn?" asked his wife coyly and then retreated, sucking on her teeth.

Olivia Lansing came forward. "I have committed every line of Ophelia's to memory. I have watched every rehearsal and know every movement. The costumes will fit me, for I am as willowy and slender as once was the deceased. And I don't need a wig, I have my own natural tresses."

Anne Hathaway thought, They'll need a thorough washing, my young vixen. And then she wondered what her husband was wondering (and, oh, what joy would have filled her dark being if she knew that for once in their lifetime they were at last in agreement!). Did this wench murder young Rutherford to further her own ambition?

Not a word was spoken for several moments. Glances were exchanged and chins were stroked, the tips of noses were scratched, hands were run through hair under perukes, and throats were cleared.

But Will Shakespeare knew this was an historical moment. He knew that on this night of financial necessity, a woman would appear on a London stage in a major role. He could see by the looks on the faces of the three troublesome ones that they could not afford to cancel the production. Olivia Lansing would take her place in history alongside the first person who ate an oyster, the first person who ate a tomato, the first person who organized a bacchanalian orgy.

Sir Ogden Willoughby spoke for them all. "Very well, wench. But

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prithee, remember this well—tonight you go onstage an anonymous young nobody, you have to come back a star!"

A star, thought Shakespeare. A murderess more than likely. If so, her career will be short-lived. There will be no garland around her neck, there will be the hangman's noose.

Roger Lansing eagerly took Will's right hand and shook it effusively. "I know my sister will do well for you, Will. She has acted for me in the privacy of our terrible home and she is wonderful. You won't be disappointed, I know you won't! Oh, thank you for clasping my hand so tightly, Will. I know in your heart of hearts you know I'm right."

Shakespeare indeed held Roger Lansing's hand in a tight clasp as his wife and the others looked at his face, which was one they now did not recognize. The features were familiar, but the shadings were black and ominous.

"What have you eaten today, Roger?"

"What? What do you mean?"

Shakespeare repeated the question, enunciating each word very slowly and very clearly, the way he spoke dialogue when he himself acted onstage.

"I've eaten nothing much, really. An apple. Some cheese and bread. That's all."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes, Will, yes! You're hurting my wrist!"

"You did not eat mutton?"

"Mutton? Who can afford mutton on my salary?"

He turned to the others. "You all know the price of mutton is prohibitive."

"You did not eat mutton," said Shakespeare stentoriously as he held up Lansing's hand for all to see, "yet look at these fingers! Are they not greasy with mutton fat? Is it not obvious that he has had plenty of mutton?"

There was a susurrus of murmurs interlarded with some clicking of tongues, and from Sir Ogden a very studious "Yea, verily."

"My wife brought with her to London a leg of mutton—cooked, of course—on which she chomped to sustain her through the long and arduous journey. Her hands were larded with mutton grease. When first she showed me the snee back at the Prawn and Pullet, she transferred this grease to the hilt. And you, Roger Lansing, when you purloined the weapon from her handbag, you grasped the hilt

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and covered yourself not with glory, but with mutton grease! I charge you with the murder of young Rutherford!"

Roger Lansing screamed as he sank to his knees and Sir Ogden sent a boy to find a person of authority to take the culprit into custody. "I did it for Olivia! I could not stand her frustration and her suffering! I know her to be a fine actress and she deserved her chance! I will go gladly to the gallows or to the headsman or whatever is fashionable when I am sentenced! I am not sorry! I am not sorry, and I know that God will forgive me for striking this blow against the discrimination of women!"

Shakespeare looked at him coldly and said, "Murder Will out."

DETECTIVERSE

NEWTON'S OTHER LAW?

by BARBARA SPRIGGS-GILL

A magician, after much contemplation,
Decided to try levitation.
He lifted some jewels
But forgot a few rules
Of the gravity of some situations.

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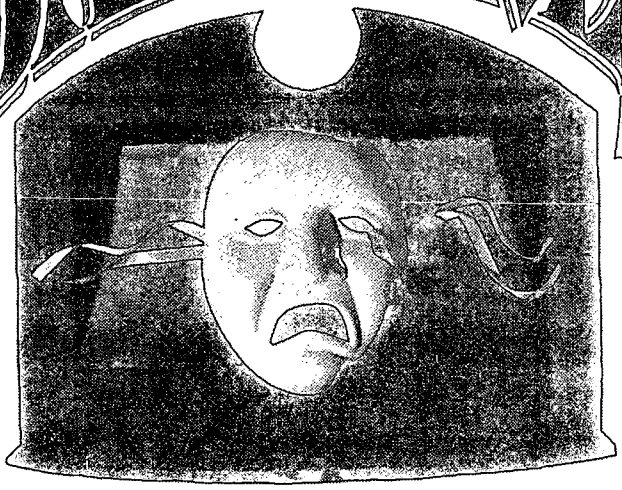
NEW

FROM THE EDITOR OF
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE
OUR LATEST ANTHOLOGY

BAD SCENES



The Dictionary of American Slang defines a bad scene as "Something unpleasant, esp. an unpleasant experience." Without question, the twenty-five stories in this new Ellery Queen anthology meet this qualification. Enjoy this chilling collection of tales by Stanley Ellin, Robert Twohy, Pete Hamill, Helen Reilly and others.

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***NEW* from**

HEIDI VANDERBILT

Sammy put down a yellow crayon he'd been using and picked up a black one. He made X's over what he'd already colored.

"This is a boy," he said. "This yellow is a jack-o'lantern boy, a Halloween boy, a pumpkin. He's being crossed out, see? The black crayon crosses him out, over and over. The black crayon's a witch. And when she's done erasing him there will be a hole in the paper, a hole in the table, a hole in the boy."

An incisive and harrowing new excerpt from Heidi Vanderbilt's novel-in-progress, which is sparking a surprising response from readers. As Stanley Ellin wrote of his own work, "Touching nerves is what I most hope to achieve in a story . . ."

GIFTS

by HEIDI VANDERBILT

Feeling eyes on her, Marta woke. Ezra and Sammy stood silently in front of her, dressed, their bookbags leaning against their ankles.

I'm in a chair, she realized. In the kitchen.

"We have to go to school." Ezra stared at her, dark eyes huge under his heavy black curls.

"What time is it?" Maybe she could go back to sleep for a minute.

"Seven-thirty." He looked worried. "Why did you sleep in the kitchen?"

"I didn't. I came down for some tea."

A dream had woken her before dawn: She sat with Ezra on the witness stand at tomorrow's hearing, facing Sammy's mother, Christine. The judge, enormous and grey-faced, towered over her. Lawyers

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and social workers stood before her, accusing her of Christine's crimes, all of them and more. Christine laughed, her face changing to a cat's, a panther's, then back. Marta's ex-husband Darren, his pipe jammed into his Sigmund Freud beard, shoved his way to the front of the crowd, joining her condemners. They were going to take Ezra away from her. Marta reached toward Sammy's social worker, but the farther she reached, the farther Belinda receded. Guards pulled Ezra from Marta's side, matrons with handcuffs hanging from black-leather belts lifted him over the railing. He screamed and reached for her. She woke shaking, mistaking the distant foghorn for Ezra's cries.

She had come down to her warm kitchen, sunk into the armchair by the big window, and stared out into heavy fog.

Now, awake, she told Ezra, "I just dozed off,"

"You were drooling, Ma-ma-ma," Sammy said.

"She's *not* your mother," Ezra snarled. "She's mine."

"She's mine now, too."

"Hey, guys, cut it out. Did you eat breakfast?"

"Yeah, Mom. We have to get the bus." Ezra hoisted his backpack onto his shoulder.

Sammy copied him, his whitewashed hair sweeping his shirt collar. He's grown so much since he came here, Marta thought. He had filled out until he was almost plump, stocky in contrast to Ezra's thinness.

She got up and hugged them. "Okay, go."

They ran into the frosty morning, leaving the back door open. She closed it slowly and watched them, fair and dark, scramble onto their bus.

Six months ago, Sammy Spencer—age seven, father unknown—had come to live with them. Marta and Ezra had moved to the island last year when she separated from Darren, a psychotherapist with a practice in Los Angeles. Within a few weeks, her phone had started ringing late every night.

"Can I come over, please?" A child's frightened voice. "This is Sammy Spencer. Would you come get me?"

Eventually, Marta called the police.

A court order moved Sammy from his mother's filthy, cavernous mansion overlooking Puget Sound to Marta's house in the woods. He came with frightened eyes and tattered clothes, brought his mother's failings and handed them to Marta at the door. Fix me, he seemed to beg, make me all right.

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"He'll just be with you for a few days," the social workers said. "Until the hearing."

On the phone that first night, Marta had repeated their words to Darren, who snorted his disbelief.

"You've got that kid forever, Marta. You'll see. They won't move him unless he can go back to his mother, and from what you've told me that'll never happen. The only way he'll leave is if you throw him out."

"Stop dramatizing, Darren. It's only for a few days."

"You don't understand anything!" he had yelled. "Bringing that little bastard home will ruin Ezra's life!"

Marta hung up on him.

After the first hearing—case continued—Sammy had stayed on. And after the second.

"Thank God someone's helping that child at last," the pediatrician's nurse said.

Sammy's second-grade teacher told her, "He's not fighting as much during recess. You're doing a wonderful job."

After the next hearing—case continued—Ezra's third-grade teacher said, "Ezra seems happy and well adjusted. He's very bright. In fact, I think we might consider skipping him a grade."

So there, Darren, she thought, you son of a bitch. Ezra's fine. Ezra has everything: two parents, two homes, friends, success.

Sammy had nothing, only Marta. What would happen to him if he got moved off this island where he'd grown up, moved from home to home, maybe even to a group home with a half dozen disturbed children? The social workers had said that was a possibility. He was already inconsolable with grief and fear and guilt. He had already lost one mother. What would become of him if he lost two, or three, or four? Who in the whole world could stand that? However difficult this period might be for her and Ezra, she couldn't abandon Sammy.

She wrapped her bathrobe around herself and turned away from the door.

Oh, God, she thought. I forgot to tell Sammy his mother's coming!

Last night after dinner, the children were upstairs working on their Halloween costumes when Marta answered the kitchen phone: Belinda calling from her home on the mainland. Marta pictured her standing, as she herself stood, over a sinkful of dirty dishes. But the kitchen counter, which came up to Marta's waist, would barely reach Belinda's hips. She towered over everyone, her rugged features rem-

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iniscent of movie cowboys. Marta could see Belinda, mounted on a big palomino, galloping to her and Sammy's rescue.

Belinda rarely called, more rarely visited. She hated the long ferry ride, the island's tortured dirt roads, the hostile looks of people in the town.

But Marta hungered for talks with her, discussions of Sammy's case, the social worker's opinions of his behavior and his mother's. Belinda was Marta's link to the court, her support, her teacher.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Marta had asked last night when Belinda, in her incongruously little-girl voice, told her what she wanted. "Sammy hasn't seen Christine since the first court date last spring. He never tried to go back to her, never called her, never even asked about her. What if he doesn't *want* to see his mother?"

"Listen, Marta, I don't want to come all the way over there tomorrow, either. But Sammy's mother is on-island and wants to see him."

Marta pictured Christine's bloated face, spiky yellow hair, tatooed wrist. Ever since she had come into their lives, Marta had locked the doors. When Christine was on-island, she locked the windows, too.

"I really don't want her coming here."

"I think you might find it less disruptive in the long run to have the meeting at home," Belinda said.

"But Christine's totally unpredictable! She's more likely to show up drunk than sober."

"Christine's drinking isn't the issue. Sammy was removed for *suspected* physical abuse."

"But her drinking is part—"

"It's not for you to judge her, Marta. Many people drink and it doesn't affect their ability to parent. You have a glass of wine now and then. I enjoy my cocktail. Even my youngest daughter drinks. I used to object, but, hey, we'd all be in trouble if drinking was held against us."

There was something missing in Belinda's argument but Marta couldn't quite grasp it.

"But why does it have to be here?"

"There's really no other place to hold this meeting, Marta."

"What about the school? Or one of the rooms in the Court House? What about holding it at Sammy's therapist's?"

"I tried," Belinda assured her. "Those places either weren't available or were too expensive."

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Belinda must know what she was doing. She was in charge of the case. She had Sammy's best interests at heart; that was her job. Marta's job was to care for Sammy while Belinda, her Department, and the legal system tried to reunite him with his mother. If possible. And maybe it was possible, maybe Christine could get better. Someday.

What a mess, Marta thought. But it won't last forever, no matter what Darren said.

"I'm surprised you're objecting, Marta. You always said you were willing to do anything to help Sammy."

"Anything reasonable."

"I don't see what's unreasonable about having the meeting at your house. Sammy's comfortable there. An office can feel pretty impersonal to a child. I'll come over on the one o'clock boat. I'll pick up Christine in town and get her out to you at three."

Marta had dropped her head into her hands and groaned.

Now she'd forgotten to tell Sammy. She turned to the phone: she could call the school and leave a message. No, that would be awful; she couldn't ask a teacher to tell him. She'd go get him out of class herself and tell him. No good, either—too upsetting, and all the kids would know. She'd just have to pick him up at school at the end of the day and tell him on the way home.

On her way upstairs, she picked up Ezra's slippers and tossed them into his room. Ezra lived on the verge of chaos: armored tanks drove in and out the legs of discarded underpants; metal soldiers guarded forts made of crumpled homework papers; pens and pencils poked from under the edges of his rug. The only level object in the room was a sign he'd carved in shop and nailed to his door:

KeeP OuT SammY
THiS MeanS YOU!!!!

What if Belinda wanted another one of her tours, this time with Christine? She shut Ezra's door tight, wishing she could hide the sign, and opened Sammy's. She picked up his stuffed animals, lined them along the headboard, tucked in the new blue Superman sheets she'd bought him last week.

By the time she had dressed and cleaned the house, the fog looked like it might lift. She still had to do the marketing and a final tidying before going to the school. She opened the refrigerator door and stared in to see if she was hungry. Over the foghorn, the noon siren sounded in the distance.

Marta grabbed her pocketbook and raincoat and ran to the car.

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She parked in a loading zone outside the market and headed down the almost deserted aisles: milk, cottage cheese, yogurt, orange juice, apple cider, a cheap straw basket shaped like a horn. She selected two high-fiber, low-sugar cereals the kids loathed and raced for the vegetables.

A parking ticket was tucked into the Subaru's windshield wiper.

Purple streaks sizzled across her vision and a sharp little throb started in her temple. She might have time to lie down. But as soon as she pictured herself napping, she also pictured herself oversleeping.

At home, she swept brittle leaves from the stoop.

She sat in the car outside the school, fog lights on, peering toward the heavy double doors. She spotted Ezra first and started to call to him, but his beauty, the curve of his dark head, his body small and narrow under his jacket and jeans, caught her voice and silenced her. He came out the school door dragging his bookbag by the strap, walked head down, ignoring the children who swirled around him.

"Ezra!"

He didn't hear her. He'd made his fingers into guns and was shooting the sidewalk.

"Ezra!"

He looked up, scanned the schoolyard, then looked down again and ambled toward his bus. His cheeks puffed out as he fired his guns.

"Ezra!"

She waved out the car window. He stared at her for a minute, unsettled by this change in routine, then walked reluctantly over to her.

"Do I have to go to the dentist?" He tossed his bag into the back seat, but stood waiting for her answer. If she said yes, he'd ride in back, arms folded, staring out the window.

"No, no." She was seeing orange and indigo lines and felt nauseous. She didn't want Ezra mad at her.

"The doctor?" he asked, still outside.

"No. Get in. You're blocking my view. I have to pick Sammy up early because his mother's coming to visit right after school."

He opened the front door and slid in next to her.

"Too bad," he said.

"I'm not looking forward to it, either." Marta squinted at the exiting children, looking for Sammy.

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"I mean it's too bad 'cause Sammy's after school."

"Being kept after school," she corrected before she realized what he'd said. "What do you mean? What for?"

"He called a teacher a swear." Ezra settled back into the bucket seat and crossed his legs the way his father did.

"Who'd he swear at? What did he say?"

"A really bad swear, Mom. I think he's gonna get 'spelled."

"What did he say, Ezra?"

Ezra shook his head.

"I won't get mad at you. Go on, tell me."

"I can't, Mom."

"Why not?"

It was already two-thirty. She had to get Sammy home before three or risk not being there when his mother showed up. How in hell would she explain that?

"Ezra, why can't you tell me? Didn't you hear him?"

"Oh, I heard him." Ezra was obviously enjoying himself. If he had a pipe like his father's, he'd light it, puff on it, stall her with it. "You don't know I know these words," he said.

"Ez, they're only words! Now tell me!"

He did.

"Oh, swell." Marta chewed her thumbnail.

"He's been in the principal's office all day."

She touched his cheek. His eyes, which used to be so merry, had a new wariness. She had always seen his spirit radiating out of him with joy and humor. Now it seemed small and cramped, as if his life had diminished until he existed solely in his mind—a wonderful, defended intellect.

It was her fault for trying to save Sammy. But if she didn't?

She pulled the key out of the ignition. "I'm going in. If I'm not out by dark, call in the troops."

Ezra sprayed the school building with bullets. "You can count on me."

She got out of the car.

"I love you, Mom." He reached both hands to her, guns dropped and forgotten.

Sammy's face bobbed up and down in the rearview mirror, his cheeks flushed scarlet under pale-yellow hair.

"You may not *ever* speak to *anyone* like that again, you hear me?"

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She was shouting—it felt good, right. Sammy glared at the back of her head. He wouldn't meet her eyes.

"People do not speak to each other like that. I don't call you names. I don't call Ezra names. Ezra doesn't call me or his father or his teachers names."

Ezra looked out the Subaru's dusty window at the passing fields. She saw from the curve of his cheek that he was smiling.

"It's *nasty*." She felt she'd never need to draw breath again, as if she'd been waiting all her life to be so clear and certain. Then with a little sickish jolt she realized she might be yelling at Sammy as much about his visit with his mother as about his misbehavior.

"It hurts people's feelings when you swear at them," she said more quietly.

"It hurt my feelings when my mother swore at me," Sammy said. "And hit me."

All the anger and indignation left her. She wanted to let go of the steering wheel, turn around, and sweep Sammy into a hug that would erase his past and replace it with love, a hug to carry him into the future, secure, steady, part of her.

"Belinda called last night." She had to tell him. "Your mother's on-island. She's coming to visit you."

Sammy's eyes snapped to hers.

"When?"

"Today. This afternoon. They're coming at three."

She tried to read his expression.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

He shrugged.

They drove in silence up the cliff road. The fog near the top had thinned and Marta had a brief glimpse of whitecaps on the Sound before turning onto their dirt road. She stopped by the mailbox and Ezra reached in. As she drove on, dodging the familiar ruts and potholes, he read the envelopes.

"This is for me!" he cried. "From Dad! A real letter!" He tore the envelope open and read silently. "Wow! Oh, wow!"

"What is it, Ez?" Marta asked.

"Dad's getting me a phone! He says I can have a phone in my room! My own phone! He says he can call me on it! I can call him! Oh, mega-wow!"

She wanted to slam on the brakes and shout, *"I'm in charge here and you cannot have a phone!"* Darren hadn't asked her, hadn't even told her. He was doing everything he could to make things harder,

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probably on purpose. But if she confronted him—his term—he'd drown her in psychotherapy jargon that always meant he was right and she was wrong.

She pulled off the drive onto the grass by the front door to give Belinda's car room when it came.

"That's some gift," she said.

"Did I get a letter?" Sammy asked in a flat voice.

Ezra shook his head, still reading. "I bet I can call anywhere, right, Mom? I could call Dad and Grandma and the Pentagon."

"Let's go in," Marta said, but no one moved.

Sammy stared out the window at the two uncarved pumpkins on the stoop, chewing his lip.

Ezra dialed his imaginary phone. "Bring, bring," he said. "Is this Daddy? Ezra here, your son. Your *only* son."

Sammy reached around the bucket seat and punched Ezra in the eye.

By three-thirty, Belinda and Christine still hadn't come. Every few minutes the foghorn sounded. Ezra sat on a kitchen chair, holding ice cubes wrapped in a dishtowel against his cheek. Sammy sat beside him, coloring on a big pad of paper. Marta leaned against the counter, longing to lie down. Absently, she twisted the dial of the radio from station to station to catch the news—as if someone might broadcast the social worker's whereabouts and time of arrival. If only they'd come, the meeting would be over and she could go to bed. Perhaps while she slept the headache would wear itself out. Now it lurked, sending rhythmic darts into her eye and along her temple. Her nose ran and she daubed it with a paper towel. She tuned from public radio to the local station, then back.

"Mom, could you please stop that?"

"Sorry."

Sammy said nothing, didn't look at them, just dragged his crayon back and forth over the same spot on the paper, building a thick smear. Marta couldn't tell what he was thinking and didn't want to find out. She just prayed everything would go smoothly from now on. She picked up a pencil and tapped it on the counter.

"Mom!"

"Sorry." She reached over and touched his head.

Early last March, before Sammy came to live with them, Ezra had flown to Los Angeles for one of his weekend visits to his father. Sunday, Marta had driven to the airport to meet his plane. Fog was

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rolling in through the trees onto the landing strip. The man behind the ticket counter assured her Ezra's flight was on time, the fog no problem. She went back outside to wait, sat huddled against the hood of the car, her arms wrapped around her, the air growing thicker and wetter.

Through the open terminal door she heard the pilot radio for instructions, his voice a crackle of static. The plane approached, went away, returned. Marta looked up, searching, but could see nothing but thick white cloud. Again and again, the plane passed, her black-haired child lost above her.

When the plane landed, she drove Ezra home. They made pear bread. The cleaver dropped through the fruit like a life falling through the sky. In her well lit kitchen, her small son busy beside her, she imagined his death. And with that vision she saw clearly and for the first time his life as separate from hers. She had shared his beginning, but everything in his life from then to its end was his own.

After they ate the bread, spread with apple butter and washed down with milk, she put him to bed, listened as he told her about his weekend with his father, their trips to the Farmer's Market, to the movies, to the La Brea Tar Pits. Marta sat on the bed beside him, stroking his inky curls, his freckled cheek, his small, vanilla-scented hands. He fell asleep talking, unaware that he had slipped from his mother's life.

"Do you want to carve your pumpkins?" she asked the boys.

"I'm gonna make mine fierce," Ezra said. "With slitty eyes and a long nose and huge teeth."

"What about you, Sam? What will yours look like?"

Sammy twisted away and covered his pad with his arm.

"I'm not copying you," Ezra said. "Don't worry."

Sammy hunched over the paper.

"Are you drawing your jack-o'lantern, Sam?"

Sammy put down the yellow crayon he'd been using and picked up a black one. He made X's over what he'd already colored.

"This is a boy," he said. "This yellow is a jack-o'lantern boy, a Halloween boy, a pumpkin. He's being crossed out, see? The black crayon crosses him out, over and over. The black crayon's a witch. And when she's done erasing him there will be a hole in the paper, a hole in the table, a hole in the boy . . ."

At four-thirty Marta sent the children upstairs. She squinted through the headache at the crossword puzzle. The front door opened.

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"Marta! Marta!"

Christine swept in on a wave of damp air and perfume, embracing the room with her fur sleeves. Shopping bags dangled from her arms and bumped against her stained red boots. She wore red gloves and carried a red purse, one strap broken and tied onto the other. Her hair, once pale, had been dyed a harsh, uniform black and styled in thick bangs low over her forehead.

"You are a *brick* to care for darling Samuel for me. Isn't she, Miss Grey?"

Marta heard the front door close.

"Isn't she what?" Belinda called from the hall.

"A brick! *What* would we do without her?" Christine's mouth was stained purple, her tongue, which shot back and forth across her lips, crimson.

Belinda strode into the kitchen, a cigarette dangling off her lower lip, her dark head almost brushing the door frame. Marta wanted to hug her for being there, for keeping her from being alone with Christine.

"Sorry we're late, Marta. I would have called but—" She looked around for an ashtray. Marta handed her a saucer. Along with the perfume and the cigarette smoke, she noticed the sour smell of alcohol.

"Had a little drinkie, did I." Christine laughed. "Did we." The puffy bags under her eyes were crisscrossed with small, savage lines.

Belinda drinking with Christine? Why would she do that? She couldn't really believe that Christine's drinking had nothing to do with Sammy's removal. Was this some sort of defiant gesture after last night's argument? Defensive acting out, as Darren would put it?

Belinda pulled off her trenchcoat.

"Let me!" Christine swept the coat from Belinda's arms and looked around. "The closet?" Her eyes, sharp and watery, rested on Marta. "Where *have* you put the closet?"

"I'll take it," Marta said.

"Nonsense. Just tell me where the closet went. Don't want to tire out my little brick, do I? I know how hard it is being a single parent. Samuel *is* well, isn't he? You haven't lost him, have you?"

"He's upstairs," Marta said. "Shall I call him?"

"No." Christine dropped Belinda's trenchcoat on the floor and pulled a package from one of the bags.

"For you, Marta. Open it!"

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Inside was a set of hand-embroidered guest towels.

"I should have given them to Samuel. *He's* the guest here—right, Miss Grey?"

"Well, in a sense—"

Christine pulled a pack of Camels from her handbag and lit one. She dropped her lynx coat on top of Belinda's trenchcoat and pushed the sleeves of her orange-knit dress up her forearms. The electrified cat tattooed on her wrist moved with her skin, its face twisted toward Marta. There was a new tattoo, too: a thin red snake writhing across Christine's other hand, in and out the fingers' webbing, its face and thready tongue flickering over the ball of her thumb.

Marta turned her eyes away and gathered up the coats. "I'll call Sammy."

"Not yet!" Christine pulled a round plastic pillbox from her bag, unscrewed the top, and selected three capsules. She swallowed them with water from the sink cupped in her palm, took a long sucking drag on her cigarette, and exhaled toward the ceiling. She flipped the radio on and off, on and off.

"Radio," she said. "TV. You are my friends, my buddies, righto, ladies? I know *you* are, Belinda—Miss Grey. Tell you something. TV tells me things. Importances. I saw the Pope sing to a thousand-year-old lady in a sided sliding bed." She leaned toward them. "He told me a sweecret." She looked at the snake twining through her fingers. "You won't tell? Cleopatra am I."

"That why you've changed your hair?" Marta asked.

Christine spat into her palms and smoothed her bangs. "I am looking for Antony. Have you seen him?"

"Perhaps we could have some tea?" Belinda asked.

"Here—" Christine held out another package to Marta "—is something for your prince."

"Oh, no."

"Ezra!" Christine called. "I have a present for you! Come here!"

"Christine," Belinda objected, "it's really for Marta to decide whether Ezra may have that present."

"She opened *her* present. Let him open his."

Marta heard soft footsteps on the stairs. Please let it be Sammy, she prayed. Let their meeting get started and let me and Ezra get out of here. She would take him to the Timms' down the hill, spend an hour in the barn looking at their baby pigs, patting the new mule.

"Hello, Ezra," Belinda said.

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Dressed in his homemade pilot costume, Ezra slipped quietly into the kitchen on narrow bare feet.

"This is for you, dear Ezra." Christine held out the package. "Wear it in health, in wealth, in stealth."

Ezra opened the box.

"An aviator jacket!" he gaped. "Look, Mom! It's real! It's even got a fur collar!"

"Like it?" Christine asked.

"Oh, wow—it's wicked!" He pulled it on. "It almost fits. Wait'll Dad sees it! Thanks! Look, Mom! Can I wear it trick-or-treating tonight?"

Marta wanted to pull the jacket off him and throw it at Christine.

"Samuel isn't down," Christine said. "He knows I'm here. Perhaps Samuel would rather not see me. Perhaps, Miss Marta, we should swap sons."

Belinda grabbed her arm. "I'll make the tea. Marta, you go see how Sammy's doing. I want to talk to Christine."

"I want Marta to stay right here," Christine said. "She's my brick."

Marta bent to Ezra. "Upstairs. Quick. Get your shoes on. I'll be there in a minute."

"Can I wear my jacket?"

"Yes."

She turned back to the women in her kitchen. Belinda had lit one of Christine's Camels, found the tea bags, and was pouring water.

"Ezra was mean to me once," Christine said. "But I gave it right back to him."

Belinda handed them cups of tea. "He was?" Drag on the cigarette.

"I just let him have it right back," Christine said. "It was during those two weeks he lived with me."

"Ezra never lived with you!" Marta said.

"You don't remember?" Christine exhaled. The kitchen was filling with smoke, as if the day's fog had moved inside. The air grew thicker. Marta wasn't sure any longer if she could tell who was inhaling, who exhaling. The women disappeared into it, blending.

"Marta went to Texas on a toot with one of her boy friends, Miss Grey. Ezra just walked around my house, muttering."

"What was he saying?" Belinda asked.

What the hell difference does it make? Marta thought. But she had to trust Belinda. She might be gathering important information that would help keep Sammy safe, testimony of his mother's sickness.

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She pressed the warm cup against her forehead, into the headache, and said nothing.

"Oh, you know how little boys get sort of crushes on older women?" Christine said. "With some woman who's attractive and a little older? Sammy gets really powerful crushes."

She drifted off into silence, looking at Marta.

"Yes?" Belinda prompted.

Christine tapped her forehead. "It's like they think, Hell, I'm only over here to play with her kid. I'm not, you know, a boy friend."

Marta wanted to scream at her to shut up, but Belinda was pushing. "Is that what Ezra said?"

"No, no." Christine drummed her fingers on the table, scattering ashes. "But that's what was going on."

"Well," the social worker said, "I guess it's possible."

Marta glared at her. "I'm taking Ezra to the neighbors."

"I think perhaps it would be better if you stayed," Belinda said.

"No."

"I think Sammy might feel better if you were here."

Sammy. Would it matter to him?

"If you don't stay," Christine said, "I'm going to report you as an unfit foster parent."

Marta waited for Belinda to refute this, but the social worker said nothing. Her eyes fixed on a corner of the room and her lips twitched. Belinda's scared, Marta thought. That's why she's going along with her, humoring her. That's why she wants me to stay. If this huge, strong woman is afraid, what must it be like for Sammy?

"I heard her giving you and Ezra presents," Sammy whispered. "Did she bring me something?"

"She has shopping bags full." Marta sat on his bed, holding him on her lap.

"She brought me lots and lots of presents."

"Let's go see."

"No," he whispered. "Maybe she'll just leave them. I'll open them later."

"Don't you want to see her, Sam? It's been a long time."

She was sorry she'd asked. What could he say? He probably didn't know what he wanted, except maybe someone else's life to live.

"Marta?" Belinda called from downstairs.

"Coming!" she called back. "Ready, Sam?"

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He turned away from her and curled into his comforter. "She's mad at me."

"No, she's not. She's come to see you. Why do you think she's mad?"

"'Cause I'm here."

"But, Sammy, that isn't your fault." Marta rubbed his back under his shirt. "The judge sent you here."

"Doesn't matter," he mumbled.

"Sammy, you can't hide from your mother. You'll probably see her in court tomorrow, anyway, when the judge talks to you."

"Why can't they leave me alone!" he wailed. "I don't want to go to court! I don't want to see the judge!"

"You don't have a choice, honey. And you don't really have a choice about seeing your mother. She's your mother."

"Marta?" Belinda called.

"In a minute!"

Sammy wiped his face on the Superman pillowcase and walked to the door.

He held out his hand to her. "Are you coming with me?"

"I'm coming."

"Everywhere I look—" Christine's voice floated up the stairwell from the kitchen "—everything is blackness. Up, down, all around, total blackness. That is reality for me."

Marta heard Belinda murmur something.

"I saw my mother today," Christine said distinctly.

Sammy pulled back hard against Marta's hand.

"She was bicycling along the beach below the cliff. I called to her. I ran after her, but she wouldn't stop."

"She's dead!" Sammy whispered.

"I saw her getting into a cab in Seattle last week," his mother's voice came, dreamlike and husky. "And another time, too. Here, look at this picture!"

Paper rustling.

Belinda's voice, puzzled: "The person in this picture is wearing a mask."

Christine: "I'm going to call the paper tomorrow. They'll help me find her."

Marta had to pull Sammy down the stairs. Silently, he struggled, trying to turn back. And silently she reminded herself that if Christine wanted to see him, she could see him.

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In the smoky kitchen, Marta let go. Sammy stood staring at the floor, shoulders hunched, fists clenched. Slowly he looked up at his mother, tall and rigid by the sink. He looked at her a long time, then with a half sigh, half moan so deep and animal Marta couldn't believe it had really come from him he walked to her, put his arms around Christine's waist, and buried his face in her belly.

It'll be all right, Marta thought. Thank God.

"Darling!" Christine turned Sammy's face to her and kissed him on the lips. "Darling! How you've grown! What a man you are!"

She grabbed him by the shoulders and spun him around to face Marta.

"Is Marta as good a mommy as I am?" Her fingers dug into his shoulders. "Is she better? Answer me!"

He winced and pulled away.

"Why is your hair black?"

"You like it?"

He stared at her.

"Did you bring me a present?"

"I brought you the Queen of the Nile. Isn't that enough? You haven't seen me in months, Antony. I've come to take you home."

Sammy looked wildly at Marta.

"Belinda?!" Marta asked.

"You can't take Sammy today." Belinda had slumped in her chair, staring at the table top. "We have to wait until tomorrow to hear what the judge says."

Sammy edged toward the shopping bags. "What's in here for me?"

"You'll get your presents when you come home."

"Didn't you bring him anything?" Marta knew right away she shouldn't have said it.

"I brought him guest towels, didn't I, Marta?" Christine said. "But you opened them. She opened your present, Antony. She stole you."

"Who's Anthony?"

"Christine," Belinda sighed. "If this visit is to continue—"

"You're right! Perfectly right!" Christine tossed her cigarette into the sink. "Sorry. Nerves. Strain. Not myself." She took two more pills from her pocketbook, held them out, and swallowed them dry. "Yum."

Sammy rummaged through the shopping bags. "Paper! Just paper!"

"The living room is stuffed to the ceiling with presents for when the dear, wise old judge gives you back to me. All for you when

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you're finished being Marta's little man." Squeezing his cheeks in her fingers, Christine kissed him. Sammy clenched his fists and pressed them to his temples. He made that same moaning wail—so soft. How could Belinda not hear it, Marta wondered. Yet if she did hear him, why didn't she intercede, help him? Wasn't *that* her job? Why did she just sit there? I should stop this, Marta thought. But Belinda had seen a million visits. Maybe this was normal, normal enough.

Christine released Sammy. "Now, you little hunk, do Mummy a favor and get her a drink. You know where our dear Marta keeps the booze, don't you? Well, get it. And bring three glasses."

Belinda roused herself. "I really—"

"Oh, hush," Christine said. "Just a tad of something smoothing. Go on, Samuel."

Eyes down, Sammy went to the pantry and brought out a bottle of wine.

"Already open!" Christine held the bottle for Belinda to see. "Well, our Miss Marta must be a little drinker, no? Or has she been, ah, entertaining?"

"She doesn't mean it, Marta," Sammy whispered. "She just gets like this sometimes."

"Little traitor! Come here. Come see Mummy's new tattoo. I'll tell you a story." She held the tattooed snake before him. It moved along her fingers, magically alive. "My Cleopatra asp. Once upon a time he was a good little snake. Then he bit me. I rolled him up in a rug, real tight until he couldn't breathe, a snake crape. One black, black night, I'm going to roll *you* up in a rug. You can be my snake crape, too."

"She means it!" Sammy cried. "She means it!"

"Sammy's scared," Marta told Belinda.

Belinda stubbed out her fourth cigarette. "Nonsense."

Christine whipped open cabinet doors until she found the glasses. "Oh, Antony's a good little liar, aren't you, Samuel? Have you told your other mother any of your little lies, our little secrets? People can go to jail for secrets like yours, Sammy. You better be careful what you tell. Don't talk in your sleep. Someone might believe you." She poured three glasses full.

"Belinda!" Marta pleaded.

But Belinda reached for a glass.

Her drink in her hand, Christine pushed Sammy toward the door. "Go play with your brother."

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"Mommy—"

"Go!"

"Mommy, don't, please—"

"You wanna drink, kid? No? Then beat it. Shoo."

His mouth open in a soundless yell, Sammy turned and ran.

Belinda's eyes were on her wine.

"You stupid bitches!" Marta spun out of the kitchen after Sammy.

"No," Christine's voice followed her, "here's to—what? Let's see. —Are you a mother, Miss Grey? Wonderful. Then let's drink to mothering, Miss Grey, and to Marta, my brick."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Ben rode closer for a better look. He was more interested in the fancy hearse than in the funeral itself, and he dismounted to walk nearer to it. The lettering on the side read Watt & Tarbell Undertaking Parlor, Tombstone, *and as he ran a hand over the sterling-silver trim with its gold decorations a voice behind him asked, "Admiring our hearse, stranger?"*

Ben Snow in Tombstone, Arizona Territory, after the 1890 flooding of the mines and the inevitable decline set in. Decline in population, that is, not in gunplay . . .

THE HEARSE WITH A HEART OF GOLD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The town of Tombstone, Arizona Territory, had been a thriving center for the mining of gold and silver during the 1880s, boasting a population of 10,000 at one point. All that was before the flooding of the mines in 1890 by various underground tributaries of the San Pedro River. By the time Ben Snow visited Tombstone a few years later, the inevitable decline had already set in. The courthouse, the O.K. Corral, and even Boot Hill Cemetery had begun to take on a look of benign neglect.

When Ben Snow paused on his horse Oats to study the town from the top of a sandy rise, he saw that a funeral was in progress. A pair of coal-black horses with black plumes on their heads were pulling a fancy glass-sided hearse up the road to the cemetery on Boot Hill. A handful of mourners followed behind in carriages and on horseback, winding around a cluster of waxy white yucca plants.

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Ben rode down to join them, keeping toward the rear, where a middle-aged cowhand with a weathered face sat astride his chestnut horse smoking a thin Mexican cigar. The cigar suggested to Ben that the man was merely a disinterested observer like himself. "Who died?" he asked.

"Fella named Deng Ping, a Chinaman."

"Not many of those around here," Ben commented.

"More than you'd think. They come over to work on the railroad up North. He was the only one in Tombstone, though."

Ben became aware of a sobbing woman dressed in black who might have been Oriental. "That the widow?"

"Yeah." The man took a drag on the cigar. "She's pretty broken up about it. She's part Chinese, too, I guess, but American."

"How'd he die?" Ben asked, watching the undertaker and the pallbearers as they slid the coffin from the hearse.

"Shot dead durin' a robbery. Can't trust these Chinamen, you know."

Ben grunted and rode closer for a better look. He was more interested in the fancy hearse than in the funeral itself, and he dismounted to walk nearer to it. The lettering on the side read *Watt & Tarbell Undertaking Parlor, Tombstone,* and as he ran a hand over the sterling-silver trim with its gold decorations a voice behind him asked, "Admiring our hearse, stranger?"

Ben turned to confront a man in a black suit with a bushy brown moustache. "It's a nice one, all right. You Mr. Watt or Mr. Tarbell?"

"Neither one. I just work for them. Name's Gus Blaine."

"This real gold trim on the hearse?"

Blaine glanced over to where the minister was saying a few words at graveside. "Twenty-four-karat gold leaf. And the rest of the trim is sterling silver. Hearse was made for us by the Cunningham Brothers back East in Rochester, New York. They only made eight like it, and sold them for eight thousand dollars each back in 1881. See this curved glass on the sides? It's the first ever manufactured for a vehicle."

"It must be almost a pleasure getting your last ride in one of these. Too bad Mr. Ping couldn't appreciate it."

The undertakers' assistant frowned. "Did you know him?"

"No. I was just passing through when your hearse caught my eye."

"I seen you talkin' with Harv Maxwell up on the hill over there."

"Anything wrong with that?"

"No, except that he's the one who shot the Chinaman."

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"He didn't tell me that." Ben glanced up in the direction from which he'd come, but Maxwell and his horse had gone. "He said Ping was shot during a robbery."

Gus Blaine smoothed down his moustache. The brief funeral service had ended and a pair of gravediggers were starting to shovel dirt onto the coffin. Deng Ping's widow began to sob and cry out. "Well, I suppose that's true enough," Blaine said. "Maxwell was trying to rob his laundry. Deng Ping tried to stop him and got killed."

"Isn't there any law in Tombstone?"

"Oh, sure. The sheriff'll get around to arrestin' Harv one of these times, I suppose. But he always claims his shootings are self-defense, and no one's ever argued with him."

When the funeral procession headed back down Boot Hill, Ben rode on ahead. It wasn't the killing of Deng Ping that had brought him to Tombstone.

"Did you see the hearse?" the old man asked Ben as he finished pouring two cups of tea. They were in a little adobe house at the edge of a nearby reservation.

"I saw it. There was a funeral on Boot Hill this morning."

The old man's name was Joseph Running Bear. His father had been a Sioux warrior up in the Dakotas, but that was a long time ago. Joseph Running Bear had fought with the Union forces during the Civil War and settled into a peaceful existence since then. Ben had met him once on a Texas trail, around 1880, and now the old Indian had managed to contact him, quite by chance, since Ben had never been one to leave a forwarding address.

"You told me once that you owed me a favor, Ben Snow," the Indian said, taking a sip of his tea. "Did you mean it?"

"I meant it. You saved my life back in Texas."

Joseph Running Bear said, "You would have gone on living without me. But I need your help now."

"The hearse?"

"Exactly."

"You want me to steal it?"

"I want what's inside. A man who worked with Gus Blaine at the funeral home was named Simon Glohart. Either he or an accomplice stole fifty gold bars, worth a thousand dollars each, from the Chiricahua Apaches on the reservation here. The gold is hidden in the hearse."

"How do you know that?"

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"A man named Maxwell tipped off the Apaches that Glohart had the gold and was fleeing south. Three renegade bucks escaped from the reservation and caught Glohart near the Mexican border. Before he died, he told them the gold was in the hearse."

"Maxwell," Ben murmured. "Why don't the Apaches go after the hearse themselves?"

"They would if they still had Cochise to lead them. But they are only reservation Indians now. Even those who fought with Geronimo have been transported to confinement in Florida. The three who hunted down Glohart and forced him to talk are now in prison, awaiting sentencing for murder."

"And you know their secret."

"I visited them in prison and one of them told me. I am too old and too slow to go after the gold myself."

"What will you do if I get it back for you?"

"Return it to the tribe. They came by it honestly."

Ben finished his tea. "I'll see what I can do for you."

Ben spent the rest of the afternoon roaming the town, stopping at the O.K. Corral to see the spot where the Earp brothers shot it out with the Clanton gang back in '81. It was near the courthouse that he was approached by a slim blonde woman in her early twenties, dressed in a fashionably long skirt and carrying a parasol to shield her face from the hot afternoon sun. Ben had seen young women wearing such costumes in San Francisco and New Orleans, but never in a frontier town like Tombstone.

"Pardon me," she said in a voice that carried a hint of a British accent. "Would you be Mr. Ben Snow?"

"That's me," he admitted, tipping his hat to her.

"My name is Victoria Miller. I saw you at the cemetery this morning. You were speaking to the funeral director, Mr. —"

"Blaine. Gus Blaine. Apparently he manages the place for the owners."

"I know. It was a position my uncle held before his untimely death."

"Your uncle?"

"Simon Glohart. He was tortured to death by your Red Indian savages."

"Maybe we should go somewhere and talk," Ben suggested. "How about the Tombstone Cafe?" It was right across the street from the courthouse and seemed a likely suggestion.

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"I don't often drink hard liquor."

"I'm sure they'll have something else for you, ma'am. Let's go see."

When they had settled down at a wobbly wooden table near the door, Ben ordered a glass of tonic water for her and a straight whiskey for himself. "Thank you," she said, standing her folded parasol against the wall. "It feels good to be out of the sun. How do people live here the year round?"

"They seem to manage."

"You're a cowboy, aren't you? A gunfighter."

"I carry a gun. You can see that."

"Some say you might be a U.S. marshal, sent to Tombstone under cover to arrest Harvey Maxwell."

"I heard that he shot the man who was buried today."

"That is the least of it, Mr. Snow. I believe Maxwell was also responsible for the death of my uncle and another man named Jud Firness."

"You'd better explain that."

"Jud Firness was working at the funeral parlor with my uncle. He drove the hearse and sometimes acted as a pallbearer when they needed one. He was a close friend of my uncle, and the two of them did some drinking together. Uncle Simon often mentioned him in his letters."

"He wrote you often?"

"Every few months. Recently he began hinting that he and Firness had stumbled onto a great deal of money. He said something about gold."

"From the mines?"

"I don't think so. The mines were flooded and closed by that time."

"What were his relations with the Indians around here?"

"All right, as far as I know. Personally, I haven't noticed many Indians in Tombstone. They all live on reservations, don't they? They're certainly buried there, because Uncle Simon's funeral home never handled them. That's why it was such a shock to me when they killed him."

"You said he was tortured."

"With flaming embers. When the cavalry patrol found his body near the Mexican border, it was badly burned. They tracked down the killers quickly enough—three Apaches who'd escaped from the reservation. They're in prison now, awaiting sentencing for their crime. It's expected they'll be hanged."

"Did they say why they killed your uncle?"

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"No, but they must have forced some information from him before he died."

"What about this friend you mentioned, Jud Firness?"

"Jud was stabbed to death at the funeral home just a day or two before my uncle's death. The sheriff thinks it was an attempted robbery, though nothing was stolen."

"The letters you mentioned—do you have them with you or are they back in England?"

She smiled sweetly. "I haven't lived in England for over ten years, Mr. Snow. My home is in Chicago now. I'm a hostess at a popular restaurant there. I came to Tombstone because Uncle Simon had no one else to care about him once he was dead."

"Life can be cheap on the frontier," Ben admitted.

"I do have the letters, in my hotel room, if you wish to see them."

"I do. You said Maxwell might be responsible for both deaths. What did you mean?"

"Gus Blaine told me Maxwell set the Apaches on Uncle Simon's trail. I hope you've come here to arrest him, Mr. Snow. I'll give you all the help I can."

"I'm not what you think I am, Miss Miller—"

"You may call me Victoria."

"I'm Ben."

"Ben."

"Will you be at the hotel this evening?"

"I'll be in my room after dinner."

"I may come calling to see those letters."

Darkness came suddenly in desert regions, without the lingering twilight Ben knew from farther east. There were oil lamps burning on the second floor of the funeral home, indicating that Gus Blaine or someone else must live there. But the shed that held the hearse was separated from the main house by a hundred feet and Ben could be pretty certain no one would hear him prowling about. He entered through a rear window that yielded to a sharp tap from his pistol butt on the frame.

Though the hearse was kept here, the horses were boarded at a stable down the road and there was nothing to disturb Ben as he went about the task of searching the vehicle, inside and out, for the Indian gold. It became clear almost at once that there was no possible hiding place for fifty bars of gold, even if they were fairly small. Ben had assumed they'd be in the wooden floor of the vehicle, the plat-

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form upon which the coffin rested for its journey to Boot Hill, but the wood was solid and the space between it and the metal frame of the hearse was barely thick enough for a sheet of paper. The metal roof was thin and solid, the four corner posts supporting it were equally solid, and the sides were of the curved glass that so impressed Gus Blaine. There was no hiding place for gold in any of it.

Ben turned his attention to the hearse's undercarriage and wheels, but the results were the same. He had only the moonlight coming through the shed's windows for illumination, but it was enough to convince him that nothing was hidden on the underside of the vehicle. Even the tongue where the horses were attached yielded nothing. Simon Glohart had kept his secret to the end, even under torture, and Joseph Running Bear was going to be disappointed.

He left the shed the way he had come and hurried across the barren earth to the dirt street that led back to the center of town. Heading for the hotel where Victoria Miller was staying, his attention was attracted to a nearby laundry shop where lamplight revealed unusual evening activity. As he drew nearer, he realized it was the shop of Deng Ping and friends were paying their respects to his widow.

Ben entered the laundry and waited unobtrusively until the woman in black was alone. Then he introduced himself and said, "I'm sorry about your husband. I was at the burial this morning."

The woman's vaguely Oriental features dissolved as she managed a slight smile. "I am Lotus, wife of Deng Ping. Thank you for coming."

"I never knew your husband, but I was shocked by the story of his death. Had he been long in Tombstone?"

"Too long by a day, for him. He came from China last year. We met in San Francisco and were married. I am only half Chinese." Her voice was pleasant even in grief, with an unusual lilting quality. "I had some money and we came here to open the laundry. He worked hard at it, even driving his wagon out to the reservations once a week, but it was a bad life. Deng Ping was the only Oriental here besides myself, and he was not suited to frontier life. Men like Maxwell were constantly bullying him. He could not yet read English, and though I helped with the record-keeping as much as I could it was a source of torment for him." She placed a delicate hand on her waist. "We have a child on the way, and he wanted the best for it. Sometimes he talked of returning to China, but I told him America is my home."

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"How did Maxwell happen to shoot him?"

"No one saw it, but I think he was trying to rob us. Everyone thinks so. My husband would not have stood for that. He kept a six-shooter behind the counter there. Maxwell claims he fired in self-defense and the sheriff believes him. No one else does."

"Will you remain in Tombstone?"

"There is nothing to keep me here and I cannot run the business alone. I will return to San Francisco as soon as I can."

"I wish you luck," Ben told her.

He left as some others entered the shop, and continued down the street to the Yucca Flats Hotel. It was only three stories high, with no more than twenty rooms, but it served the needs of a town that had fewer visitors with each passing year. The desk clerk said Miss Miller was in and directed him to Room 14.

It was obvious she'd been expecting him. She had a small flask of whiskey and two glasses on a bedside table and she poured him a drink at once. "I don't know what this will do for my reputation, entertaining a man in my room."

"In Tombstone it'll only make you popular. You'll probably have a line of men outside by tomorrow."

"That's what I mean." She went over to her suitcase and removed a packet of letters. "Here's the correspondence from Uncle Simon. You may read through it if you wish."

Ben skimmed quickly, finding nothing of real interest until he reached the final letter Victoria had received. It was dated nearly two months earlier. "This would have been shortly before he left Tombstone pursued by the renegade Apaches," he said.

"That's right. In fact, the news of his death reached me in Chicago one day before the letter itself arrived."

Ben reread one passage. "My dear little niece, I should tell you that I have recently come into a great deal of money, which is here at the funeral home with me. Some of it may be yours one day. Since I don't consider it a crime to steal from a sneaking yellow thief, I feel I have all rights to this gold myself. My friend Firness has been giving me some trouble, though, and I may take my treasure to the bank in Bisbee." The letter went on briefly to other matters and then ended with a promise to write again soon.

Victoria Miller took a sip of whiskey. "I suppose now you think it was the mention of gold that brought me out here."

"It's no business of mine what brought you, but I'm certainly glad

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you came. Tell me one thing—could your uncle have stabbed Jud Firness before he fled south?"

"Uncle Simon wasn't above a shady deal once in a while, but he wouldn't harm a fly. That's why what happened to him is so shocking."

"What about the Indians? Could they have killed Firness?"

"The sheriff says they deny it. They admitted killing Simon, but that was all."

Ben poured himself a little more whiskey. The night was still young and he wasn't the least bit sleepy.

In the morning, Ben stopped by the funeral parlor after breakfast and sought out Gus Blaine. He found the man back in the shed, polishing the silver and gold trim on the hearse, and was pleased that there seemed to be no sign of his entry the night before. "Can I speak with you a moment?" he asked.

"What?" Gus Blaine looked up from his labors. "Oh, you're the fella from Boot Hill yesterday."

"Ben Snow's my name. I guess we weren't properly introduced."

"What can I do for you, Snow?"

"I wanted to ask about two of your employees who got themselves killed—Jud Firness and Simon Glohart."

"Simon was killed by Apaches. Don't know much about that. Jud was stabbed to death right here in this shed."

"Here? I thought he was killed in the house."

"No, it was here. Funny thing, it was the next morning that Simon took off, heading for the border. Some folks thought he must have killed Jud, but anyone who really knew him could tell you Simon wouldn't hurt a fly."

"So I've heard."

"What are you so interested for?"

"I'm a friend of his niece."

"Sure—I should have figured that. A looker like her wouldn't be traveling alone. She was in to see me, too. Asked about her uncle. I told her the same thing—he talked rough at times, called Indians a bunch of red savages, but he didn't mean anything by it."

"Might he have stolen from them?"

"Don't know about that. I never knew him to take what wasn't his."

"Did Simon ride down to Bisbee very often?"

"Not that I know— Wait a minute, I think he did go down there

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one day a week or two before he left town for good. Said he had some business, and he was quite pleased when he got back."

"You must be short-handed here, losing two men at almost the same time."

"We were for a while. Mr. Tarbell, one of the owners, had to ride over from Tucson to help out. Now I got a couple of young fellas helpin' me. I still do all the work on the bodies, though, and drive the hearse and hire the pallbearers."

"Did you have to hire some yesterday, for Mr. Ping?"

"Sure did. It ran up the bill. Don't know how the widow will pay it."

"Maybe Harv Maxwell should give her the money."

"I didn't suggest that," Blaine answered nervously. "I feel like livin' a while longer."

It was less than twenty-five miles into Bisbee, and Ben and Oats made the journey in an hour and a half. There was only one bank in the town, a mining community that seemed to be faring better than Tombstone. The vice-president was friendly and accepted Ben's story about seeking his lost uncle, but he insisted there were no accounts under the name of Simon Glohart.

Ben had another idea. "How about Victoria Miller?"

"No, sorry."

"Do you rent safe-deposit boxes?"

The banker shook his head. "You'd have to go into Tucson for that. We don't have a big enough vault."

"Thanks for your help," Ben told him. He ate a light lunch at the local bar and then headed back north, detouring to stop at the house on the edge of the reservation where Joseph Running Bear lived, trapped between the worlds of the red man and the white.

"Have you brought me good news?" he asked from the porch as Ben rode up.

"I'm afraid not." Ben dismounted and looped Oats's reins around the hitching post. "Despite what Glohart told his killers before he died, the gold isn't hidden in that hearse."

Joseph frowned slightly. "The man who told me certainly believed it to be true."

"Why? Because he tortured the information out of Glohart before killing him?"

The old Indian raised his head. "I do not condone such methods any more than I condone such theft."

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"All right," Ben said, settling his anger. The man was a friend, and had taken no part in Glohart's killing. "Still, there's no gold in the hearse. I thought I'd traced it to a bank in Bisbee but that turned out to be a dry well. The gold is simply gone, I don't know where."

"Is it possible the man lied with his dying words?"

"Maybe your blood brother in prison is the liar. Maybe he hopes to escape and claim the gold for himself."

"No, my information was accurate."

"I don't think Glohart stole the gold in the first place. I think someone else took it." Ben told Joseph about Glohart's letter to his niece.

"Who could he mean?"

"Almost anyone. Maybe he was pointing the finger at Harv Maxwell. Do you know him?"

"I know him," Joseph replied through tight lips. "He is an enemy of the red man."

"An enemy of all men, from what I've heard. Could he have stolen the gold?"

"It was taken from a house on the Apache reservation. A man like Maxwell would never be allowed onto the land. It is still patrolled by the cavalry, you know."

"If Glohart stole the gold, he has been punished for it. What more do you want, Joseph?"

"The gold must be restored to its rightful owners."

"You're a hard old man."

Joseph Running Bear smiled slightly. "But then you already knew that."

Ben had only one place left to look, and the fact that he'd looked there before didn't deter him. The hearse was the key to it. Simon Glohart had died saying so, and Ben finally believed his words. He rode back into Tombstone and headed for the funeral parlor.

By daylight, the shed at the back stood open and Ben walked casually inside. There was no sign of Gus Blaine. Ben set about examining the wooden floor of the vehicle, where in the darkness he'd noticed a space barely deep enough for a sheet of paper. He took a hunting knife from his saddlebag and slipped it between the wood and the metal bottom of the hearse. Something was there, all right.

Not gold, but, in very fact, paper.

With some difficulty, he extracted two engraved certificates. They were negotiable government bonds, issued by the Arizona Territorial

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Bank at Bisbee. Each was in a denomination of twenty-five thousand dollars. "I'll be damned," Ben said almost to himself. "He traded the gold in for government bonds."

And there was something else visible along the right edge of the engraved certificates—dark-reddish stains that could only have been blood. The bonds had been examined by someone with a blood-stained right hand.

"I'll take those, cowboy."

The voice cut through the quiet of the shed, and Ben turned to stare into the barrel of a pistol. Harv Maxwell stood in the doorway of the shed, blotting out the sun with his broad body.

"I don't believe they belong to you."

Maxwell smiled and cocked the hammer of his six-gun. Deftly, Ben rolled sideways under the hearse as the first shot hit the ground where he'd been. He had his own gun out now, but Maxwell had retreated around the corner of the doorway and there was no opportunity to return the fire.

Then Ben saw something he hadn't noticed before. There were wooden wedges beneath the front wheels of the hearse. That might mean the ground sloped slightly here. He kicked one wedge away and then the other, diving back quickly as Maxwell fired a second shot. "Is this another case of self-defense?" he yelled out to the gunman.

The hearse began to roll ever so slightly, then gradually gained momentum. Maxwell fired again, his bullet smashing one of the glass sides as he spotted Ben running out behind the vehicle. Then Ben stopped running, and as the hearse rolled clear he fired two quick shots. Maxwell spun around and toppled to the ground.

The shooting had attracted Gus Blaine's attention and he came running from the funeral parlor carrying a shotgun. "What's happening here?" he demanded, watching while his hearse curved slightly and rolled gently into an eight-foot-tall yucca plant.

"Just a little shooting," Ben told him. "You'd better go get the sheriff."

Harv Maxwell died of his wounds before the sheriff could question him, but listening to Ben's account of the shooting Gus Blaine and Victoria Miller were both convinced the mystery was solved. "Maxwell stole the gold from the Apaches," she reasoned, "and then my uncle took it from him. When he became worried about hiding it, he took it to the territorial bank and had it changed into negotiable

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bonds. He hid them in the hearse and Maxwell killed Jud Firness trying to find them. That's when my uncle decided to flee to Mexico and those Apaches caught him. Maxwell followed you here today and saw you discover the hiding place of the bonds."

It was a simple explanation, and with Maxwell dead no one cared about questioning it. Maxwell had killed Deng Ping, if no one else, and even the sheriff wasn't anxious to defend him. He patted Ben on the shoulder and pronounced it self-defense. "You really did the town a favor. There's no room for people like Maxwell in Tombstone any more." He only paused a moment before he added, "I expect you'll be leavin' town right quick yourself, Mr. Snow."

"Tomorrow," Ben confirmed.

Later Victoria walked back to her hotel with him. "I suppose the money will have to go back to the Apaches now. It never really belonged to Uncle Simon."

"No, it didn't. You told me he wouldn't hurt a fly, and maybe that's true, but in some ways he was a bad man."

She looked up sharply. "You don't think he killed Jud Firness?"

"No, but then neither did Maxwell."

"What are you saying? I thought you agreed with what I told the sheriff back there!"

"It's a good enough explanation for the record, but the Indians tell me Harv Maxwell would never have been allowed on the reservation—he couldn't have stolen the gold. Also, there were bloody fingermarks along the edges of those bonds. Firness died instantly, so he didn't handle them after he was stabbed. Unless there was another bloody event in that shed, the fingermarks must have been made by Firness's killer, whose right hand would have been bloodied when he repeatedly stabbed him."

"It still could have been Maxwell."

"No, because he would have taken the bonds when he saw them—he wouldn't have come back to the shed weeks later and tried to steal them from me."

"It doesn't make sense. If Jud Firness was killed for the money, why didn't the murderer take it when the bonds were in his hands?"

"There can be only one explanation. He didn't know what he had. He was looking for gold and those pieces of paper meant nothing to him—because he couldn't read them."

"What?"

"I think the killer of Jud Firness, and the original gold thief, was illiterate in the English language. I think he was a man I never

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met, a man beyond the reach of the law for all time. It was the man they buried on Boot Hill yesterday, Deng Ping."

At first she would have none of it. "Even if I accept the fact of the killer being unable to read English, there are probably hundreds of people in Tombstone who qualify. Why does it have to be Deng Ping?"

"Because Maxwell told me he was the only Chinese, and his wife confirmed there were no other Orientals. When your uncle said in his letter he'd stolen the gold from a sneaking yellow thief, he was referring to the color of the man's skin, not his cowardice. A man who'd steal gold from the Apaches might be called a fool, but never a coward. And I know your uncle referred to Indians as red savages. Deng Ping's wife Lotus told me he couldn't read English, and she also told me he needed money because she was expecting a child."

"She might have done it. She's part Chinese."

Ben shook his head. "She was born and raised in San Francisco and she did the record-keeping. Obviously she can read English. But there's more. Who could have gotten onto the reservation, past the cavalry guards, to steal the gold? Not Maxwell—they wouldn't have let him past the gates. Not your uncle, nor Firness, nor Gus Blaine, because we know the Indians bury their own and never used the services of the funeral parlor. But Lotus told me her husband took his laundry wagon to the reservations once a week, giving him a perfect opportunity to steal the gold and transport it past the soldiers."

"I still can't believe it, and yet I know it must be true."

"Deng Ping heard of the hoard of gold and stole it on one of his regular trips to the reservation. But he needed money for his wife and the baby, so I think he must have asked your uncle about disposing of the gold. Simon simply stole it from him, as he wrote you. Then the trouble really began. Deng Ping wanted the gold back, Maxwell was nosing around, and, judging by his letter to you, Jud Firness was suspicious, too. Plus the Apaches themselves, of course. Simon converted the gold to bonds and hid them in the hearse. Firness must have seen him do it, and found them later—only Deng Ping came into the shed then and stabbed him. Simon panicked and headed south, where the Apaches caught up with him."

"Why did Maxwell shoot Deng Ping in his laundry?"

"To make it look like a robbery. In a way Maxwell was telling the truth when he said the Chinaman was shot during a robbery. He

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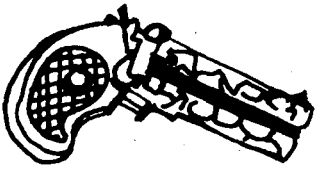
was speaking of the gold robbery, of course, and he killed Deng Ping to clear the way to the gold. He'd set the Apaches after Simon, and now he shot Deng Ping. All he had to do was find the gold for himself—and he almost did, by following me to the shed."

"Is the killing over at last?"

They'd reached Victoria's hotel, but when he turned to stare down the street Ben could still see the road to Boot Hill. "I don't think it'll ever be over in Tombstone," he said.



DETECTIVERSE

ENTREPRENEUR

by JEAN DOBBS

There was a man in our town
And he was wondrous wise—
He counterfeited perfect coins,
Till someone stole his dies.
And when he found his dies were gone,
With all his might and main
He worked to make another set,
Then forged ahead again.

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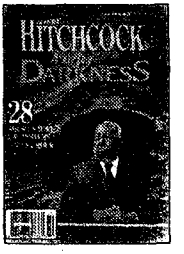
NEW

FROM THE EDITOR OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A Brief DARKNESS



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a *NEW* short story by

BRENDAN DuBOIS

"Thanks a whole hell of a lot, babe," Roy said. "I was doing what you always bug me about—I was trying to save money, trying to con the guy out of three bucks, and you blew it."

"I didn't want a fight."

"I don't care what you want. Where did you take the money from?"

"From the food budget."

"Food—is that right? You expect me to go hungry tonight 'cause of you? Was that what you were thinking?"

Brendan DuBois received a scroll this May from the Mystery Writers of America for "Driven" (EQMM Department of Third Stories, November 1986), which they considered one of the five best mystery short stories published last year . . .

A QUICK LEARNER

by BRENDAN DuBOIS

Karen had always hated the rain, and when the gas-station attendant started giving Roy a hard time it didn't help things. The attendant was bent over, his yellow slicker oily-looking from the grease stains, and water was dripping off his cap. His beard was matted with water and he was heavy-looking, at least forty pounds heavier than Roy, but of course that didn't stop Roy.

"Listen, buddy," the attendant said, his voice a snarl, "I don't care how many fingers you think you put up, I saw five and I put five in the tank. You owe me three more bucks."

Roy turned to grin at Karen, but she looked away, her large brown purse in her lap, and stared out the window. The rain made every-

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thing look grey. They were someplace in New York State. It seemed like it was all made of highways, fast roads, and shopping malls. The few trees she had seen were thin and scraggly-looking, as if they were on the verge of dying. She suddenly missed Maine and the clean beaches where the pines grew right down to the rocks at the shore. What were her sister Tracy and those kids of hers doing now? She remembered their house, old and creaky for sure, but at least it was warm and dry. And if this was Thursday, there'd be a big baked lasagna.

Hush, she thought. You're here now with your man, going south. No time to think of Maine. Think of Roy, think of Roy now.

She rearranged her purse and looked over at her boy friend.

"I've got some buddies," Roy said, "but none of them look like you, guy. Look, ask my girl friend here—she saw me. I put up two fingers, for two bucks' worth. If I wanted five, I would have put up five. If I wanted ten, I would have put up both hands. But I only asked for two." He was tapping his fingers on the steering wheel and Karen felt her stomach chill. And his grin got wider. Another bad sign. Back off, she thought, Mr. Gasoline Man, back off. You don't know about that big handgun Roy's got under the front seat.

The attendant moved his face closer. "Look yourself. I ain't explaining to my boss when the register don't balance out tonight. Either you give me the money or—"

Karen quickly opened her purse, went through the envelopes in it, found the one marked "F", and drew out three greasy singles.

"Here," she said, crumpling them up and passing them past Roy before he could react. "Take it, okay? We don't want no trouble."

The attendant grunted and put the bills into his pants. Roy looked at her, stunned.

"Start the car, Roy. Let's get going."

He muttered something and turned the key. It took three tries before the engine caught and he raced out of the parking lot, not bothering to look either way. Karen caught her breath and sat back in her seat, her arms around the purse. Roy turned and glared at her, his blue eyes like chips of rock.

"Thanks. Thanks a whole hell of a lot, babe. I was doing what you always bug me about—I was trying to save money, trying to con the guy out of three bucks, and you blew it."

"I didn't want a fight."

"I don't care what you want. Where did you take the money from?"

"From the food budget."

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"Food—is that right? You expect me to go hungry tonight 'cause of you? Was that what you were thinking?"

She looked out the window, her fist against her chin. I won't cry. I don't want him to see me cry. I won't do it. She repeated this over and over, as tears trickled down her cheeks. Outside it was still raining.

"No, you won't go hungry," she said. "Just get me some french fries from McDonald's tonight, I'm not that hungry."

Roy snorted. "I had that guy, Karen, I know I did. When are you going to learn to trust me?"

She winced at his words. Ever since they had left Maine, it had been the same thing. When are you going to learn, Karen? When are you going to learn to drive better? When are you going to grow up? When are you going to learn not to cry? Learn, learn, learn—after two years since high school, she thought she wouldn't have to listen to that any more. She pressed her fist against her chin again.

Roy leaned over and turned on the radio. Nothing came out of the speaker until he slammed the dashboard with his fist, then the radio sputtered into life. He was four years older than she was, and when they had met at a party at her cousin's in North Berwick she knew he was the one. He had short blond hair and a good build, and she liked the solid way he walked into a room, like he had control of everything the minute he stepped inside the door. She also liked his smile, the way his teeth glistened and his eyes practically danced.

Karen looked over. He wasn't smiling, which was fine with her. She no longer thought the smile was so cute, especially after that time back in New Hampshire. She pushed the thought from her mind. No, I won't think about that. I won't think of what happened, what Roy did after he started smiling.

Roy was wearing a heavy flannel shirt and jeans, and his leather jacket was strewn across the back seat, along with her suitcase and his green duffel bag. She was wearing her best jeans and a wrinkled Western-style shirt under a jean jacket. It was her favorite shirt and she hated the wrinkles, but she had no iron.

"Here we are," Roy said, making a wide turn. "Look at that shopping center."

The shopping center was still under construction. Toward the right were some piles of dirt and yellow construction equipment. There was a clothing store, a restaurant, a couple of shops, and a bank at the far end. Roy stopped the car. The engine coughed and rumbled and he kept racing the gas to keep it going. He leaned over into the

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back seat and pulled a pack of cigarettes from his leather coat. He lit one up and she was glad of the tobacco smell. It masked some of the sour odors coming from their clothing in the back seat.

"See? See that bank right there? That's where I'll be tomorrow." Roy took a deep drag from his cigarette. His face was stubbled with whiskers. "It's right at the end of the center, which is good, gives me room. You just make a quick turn out of the parking lot and in a couple of minutes you're at a highway. Another ten or fifteen and we're into Vermont."

"But our trip—" she began.

"What trip?"

"Florida. We're supposed to be going to Florida."

Roy stubbed out the cigarette in the overflowing ashtray. "We are, just as soon as we get some money."

"But Vermont is going back north."

"Don't tell me which is north and south, Karen, I know. But if we go south, we're running into big towns and cities, where the cops will be looking for us. We go into Vermont a couple of days, maybe a week, and let things cool off."

Florida. Oh, Florida. She had never been south of New Hampshire in all her life. It was getting on toward October and the rain was cold and the days were short, and she had read that the ocean in Florida was light-blue and warm, like bathwater. Living close to the Atlantic, she had been to those beaches lots of times, but even in the hottest day in August the waters would be dark-grey and cold.

Florida. Roy had said one night that he was going to Florida, and she had said yes, I want to come along. That had been almost a month ago and now they were only in New York. Did Roy really want to go, or was he enjoying himself too much?

She bit her lip. "That sounds fine, I guess."

"Good." He leaned over and kissed her. She tried hard not to draw back. His breath reeked of cigarette smoke. At any other time, especially back in Maine, it wouldn't have bothered her. It bothered her now.

With the last of the money from the "R" envelope, for rooms, they rented a motel room almost at the outskirts of the city. Roy didn't like the envelope system she had devised, but she guessed he gave into it because it was the only thing that seemed to work. Roy didn't have a good head for money, he just let it slip through his fingers,

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but Karen knew how hard it was to get money. Growing up without a mom and dad will give you that.

The room was small, with only a single bed, a dresser, and a black-and-white TV stuck in a corner. There wasn't any phone in the room, but there was a bathroom off to one end. Karen sat on the edge of the bed. The mattress was soft and mushy, and the tassled blue bedspread was dotted with cigarette burns. Roy piled her suitcase and his duffel bag in one corner, and after using the bathroom he came out and said, "I'm going to get supper. You wanna take a shower or something?"

Karen gave him the few dollars left in the "F" envelope and he walked out, not bothering to give her a kiss.

She picked up her suitcase, dragging it into the bathroom. The linoleum was cracked, but at least there was soap in the shower. Which first, the clothes or herself? They didn't have enough money for a laundromat, hadn't had since they left Maine, so she had been washing her clothes in showers and bathtubs in the motels they stopped in, hanging up the clothes on the curtain rod and drying them with her hair dryer.

She looked into the mirror. Her face was pinched and her eyebrows were heavy, but it was her hair that repulsed her the most. She picked up a few greasy-brown strands in her hand and rubbed them together. The grittiness decided her. She was going first. The clothes could wait.

She could have spent hours in the shower, washing and rewashing her hair, making sure the last trace of dirt was gone. She turned the water up as hot as she could stand it and luxuriated under the hot streams of water, feeling it pulsate against her shoulders. She didn't care if she went through the whole bar of soap, she lathered herself from her head down to her feet, rinsing herself off, then soaping and rinsing herself again. She loved showers, loved the clean feeling and the steam rising up around her. Her only regret was that she didn't have a razor. Her legs were getting stubbly.

She rubbed the soap across her shoulders, massaging in the heat, remembering that it had been a warm day when she had first met Roy at that party. They had gone out for a while, Roy taking her to the movies or to some fine restaurants in York. He had dressed well, always smelling of cologne, and when she had asked what he did for a living he had always changed the subject. She imagined

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that he was some kind of secret agent or drug dealer, and in a way she hadn't been far off.

Then one day he had said he was going, heading south to Florida. By now she was convinced she was in love with him. —Going south. It sounded wonderful—more wonderful than working at the mall again in the winter, and Maine winters were *cold*. Her sister Tracy had frowned and put up something of a fight when she told her she was leaving with Roy. "I know what it's like when you got someone," Tracy had said. "But—well, remember this. You can always come back here when you're done."

Karen rinsed herself again. She remembered the first day—driving out, a six-pack of beer between them in the front seat. Her asking, "Roy, tell me what you really do?" And Roy grinning back, his blue eyes bright. "Among other things, I'm a thief." At the time, she was half drunk, so she giggled and talked about something else, but it was true. Roy was a thief. By the time they had left Maine, he had robbed a gas station, a restaurant, and a store.

At first Karen had been scared, but Roy was so smart, so cocky, and it was a thrill to see him run out of a place, gun in one hand, a bundle of cash in another. Such a thrill. Until New Hampshire.

The soap fell from her hands. She leaned against the ceramic tile and lifted her face, letting the hot water pound against her, remembering it all. A corner grocery store in some small town. Roy pulling up near it, laughing, getting out of the car with the gun in his hand. The grocer was a small, overweight man. She could see him through the plate-glass window. After Roy went in, she saw the grocer get angry. He was waving his pudgy hands around. Roy's face was angry, too, at first—and then he smiled. This made her smile, too, until he brought up the handgun. Boom. Another boom. The plate-glass window was sprayed with blood, and shattered. The grocer crumpled out of sight, Roy leaned over the counter firing until the gun was empty, that happy smile on his face, and then he ran out to her. She was too scared to scream or cry or move, and he drove the car away, grinning. "Guy tried to tell me the money was in the safe and he didn't have the combination."

Later, she was sure she must have screamed later.

She got out of the shower, drying herself off and wrapping a towel around her. Time for her clothes—and Roy's if she had the time, though he didn't seem to care if his clothes were clean or not.

Hunched over the tub, letting the water run into the clothes, she recalled Tracy saying she could always come back. Yeah, Tracy, but

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with what? If I start hitching, Roy's going to be mad that I left him—and then he's going to chase me, big sister. He'll chase me until he finds me, and by then he'll be real mad and, no, I don't want to see Roy mad.

For supper Roy had three cheeseburgers, a large fry, and a large Coke. He had gotten a small Coke and a small fry for Karen. "You said you weren't hungry," he reminded her, and he idly watched a game show on the flickering black-and-white set as he ate.

Karen sat on the other end of the bed. The Coke was warm, the french fries were cold. She watched Roy as he ate, the way he mechanically put the food away. Don't you even taste it? she thought. Don't you feel anything? She wanted one of those cheeseburgers, damn it, and her stomach growled as she finished her fries. She was still hungry and her boy friend was wolfing down three cheeseburgers like they were nothing. So why don't you complain? she asked herself. Chicken?

God, yes, she thought.

Roy crumpled up the waste paper, belched, and then strode over to the duffel bag. He unzipped it and brought out two handguns. She recognized the one he always used. The other one was smaller, but looked just as deadly. Roy sat back on the bed, a gun in each hand.

"School time," he said, putting the familiar gun down and working with the smaller one. "I want you to learn to use this, Karen."

She felt like moving off the bed. "I don't like guns, Roy."

He did something to the gun and the bullets fell out, clicking together like marbles. "Tomorrow," he said, "I'm going after a bank, Karen—I'm going after something big. At nine A.M. I'm going to be one of their first customers. Friday's payday, those cash drawers are going to be stuffed, and I'm gonna do some unstuffing. And I'm gonna need you as a backup in case something goes wrong. It's about time you pulled some weight. Here. Listen and learn."

She kept quiet and watched as he moved his hands across the revolver, as he talked about rounds, chambers, and the hammer. She picked it up when he told her to, and without any bullets in it she practiced pulling the trigger.

When Roy was done, he leaned back and stretched, letting his muscles pop. She smiled a little and he smiled back, a good smile that reawakened something inside her.

"Roy?"

"Hmm?" he said.

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"Roy, when we're in Florida, will you stop this? Stop robbing stores and banks?"

He turned and looked at her, still smiling, but the warmth was gone. "Give up what I do? Is that what you want?"

Frightened, she could only nod. His smile was now mocking. "Why, Karen, what a wonderful idea. Give up what I do best. That sounds fine. Just great. Maybe I can get a job at a Burger King or Pizza Hut—free uniforms and all the food I can sneak home. Does that sound good to you?"

She drew her legs up to her chin, wrapped her arms around herself. "Roy—"

"No, fine, I'll do that, Karen. Anything you say. I'm sure there are hundreds of jobs out there for a guy like me who dropped out when he was fifteen. I see those ads all the time, don't you? High-school dropout wanted, preferably with a record. Will pay a quarter over minimum wage. And then we can get married and have a bunch of squawling kids. And maybe when I'm thirty I'll be *junior assistant fry manager or some freaking thing!*"

Karen buried her face in her legs. Can't cry. Can't let him see me cry. She looked up.

Roy bounced off the bed and grabbed his leather jacket. "I'm going out." He went to the dresser, grabbed her purse, and started pawing through it. Her wallet fell out, then her lipstick and brush. Her purse, her things.

He went through the envelopes, emptying them of all the money meant for gas, food, motel rooms, emergencies. "And I'm going to get drunk," he announced before he slammed the door.

She was half asleep when the car roared in and its lights lit up the room. She sat up in bed, wearing one of Roy's T-shirts. The room went dark when the lights went off and she held her breath. Then the door flew open and Roy stumbled in, mumbling to himself. She smelled a strong odor of beer and he cursed, his voice deep and sharp, as he knocked over a lamp. The crash made her jump and then hold herself stiffly as he sat down on the edge of the bed.

Then he slowly slid off, and coughed once, twice, and started to retch.

Oh, God, she thought, the sour smell striking her senses. She reached out and turned on the side lamp, blinking from the sudden light. Roy was crumpled on his side. The smell was awful and she thought, I've got to clean it up, I can't leave it there, and then she

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switched off the lamp and burrowed into the bed, pulling the blankets over her head, trying to block out the noise of his breathing and the smell.

In the morning, Karen got out of bed as quietly as she could, not wanting to wake Roy. He was rolled up in the covers next to her, a bare foot hanging off the bed. He snorted and grumbled, and his breath smelled like dead fish. She took her time walking across the room, knowing there was probably broken glass there. During the night, Roy must have gotten up off the floor and come to bed.

There was no money left in her purse, just a few pennies and a quarter. Not even enough for a cup of coffee. Maine and Florida were too far away. But the quarter in her hand was shiny. Money enough for a phone call. Maybe to Tracy. Maybe Tracy would come get her.

Karen looked at the coin in her hand. Tracy and her husband were just scraping by, they didn't have the money to come rescue her. And if she left him, Roy would always follow, she was sure of that.

Roy coughed and rolled over. Her boy friend. Ready to rob a bank in a couple of hours. And for me, she thought, just cleaning up one damn mess after another.

He didn't apologize, didn't say anything about last night, which made it worse in a way. He just whistled and checked the two handguns, and after loading up the car he stuck one gun in his waistband and handed the other to Karen. She put it in her purse. It was heavy and threw her off-stride, and she checked her watch as she got into the car. Eight-thirty.

In the car Roy said, "Remember what I said. Drop me off in the parking lot and wait until nine-oh-five, and then drive up to the bank. I'll be ready, then. Use the gun if you have to, but don't leave anything behind for evidence. Okay?"

The purse was heavy in her lap. "Okay," she murmured.

"Fine." Roy was grinning. "How does breakfast in Vermont sound?"

She only nodded.

When they reached the parking lot, Roy gave her a kiss, but she moved her head, offering only her cheek. It didn't seem to faze him—he strode across the lot, his hands in his pockets, walking in that same manner of control she had liked so much when she had met him.

When he was out of sight, she moved the car around in the parking

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lot and found a single space, far on the other side, near one of the piles of dirt where the construction work was going on. She switched off the engine and stepped out. It had stopped raining and the fresh air felt wonderful. She could see the bank from where she was standing.

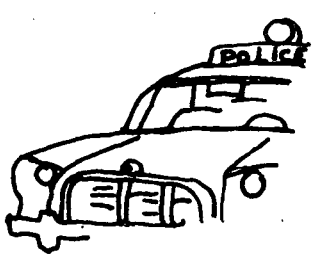
So strange. To come from Maine and end up in a parking lot in New York. She was going to ask herself how did I get here, but she remembered last night and everything else and she knew what was ahead of her.

She checked her watch. Nine in the morning. She looked up. Roy was walking into the bank. She opened the car door and went back inside, but she came out again, her purse over her shoulder, her suitcase in her hand, and locked the car.

The morning sun was bright. She took a deep breath and placed the suitcase down, reaching in with one hand to her purse. She looked across the lot and saw some cars moving in around the bank and then Roy ran out, a bag in one hand, the gun in the other, and men were leaping out of parked cars, shotguns and handguns at the ready, all of the cops yelling at Roy, all of them there because of her phonecall. He was looking around wildly, and she knew what he was looking for.

She drew out the handgun and aimed it at the dirt pile and fired once, the gun kicking in her hands.

At that sound, the police at the other side of the parking lot opened fire, the sounds echoing and booming across the lot. Karen started walking away, suitcase in her hand, not wanting to look back. The gun was warm and she was about to drop it on the ground but, no, that was evidence, and she put it back into her purse. She had learned at least that.



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a *NEW* Jojo story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"From other statements," Detective-Inspector Barrows said, "we're getting a rough idea of everyone's movements. You, for instance, were very much on public view from the moment you declared the fete, or whatever we term it, officially open."

Jojo, better known to stage and TV buffs as actress Joy Lorraine, liked the country—right where it was, well distant from London—but her school chum, Carrie Slate, was in a spot of trouble and so Jojo agreed to come down to Tollington for a weekend visit, ostensibly to open a village affair to raise money for the Red Cross hut . . .

JOJO AND THE DOMESTIC IDYLL

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Carrie Slate had seemed doomed to a life of banal tragedy, of ordeal by cliches.

She worked to put her first husband through medical school and the new-fledged doctor promptly traded her in for a newer model in the shape of his receptionist—a very svelte shape at that. Nobody would ever accuse Carrie of svelteness.

She survived that, inherited unexpected pots of money from an uncle, then fell for her hairdresser. Mr. Carlo, aka Charlie Slate, was a real little Cockney chancer and stud, trustworthy as an elderly used car.

"You're her best friend," Carrie's mother had wailed to Jojo back in 1972, "she listens to you. Argue her out of it, the man's a fortune hunter!"

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Jojo, better known to stage and TV buffs as actress Joy Lorraine, refused to intervene. "Friends take anything—even insults—sooner than advice. Of course, Charlie Slate will break her heart, but Carrie will have a *super* time on the way there, before all that lovely fairy gold turns to autumn leaves." People call Jojo a cynic but she believes herself a realist.

As it happened, both Carrie's mother and Jojo were wrongly pessimistic. Maybe the crucial factor was Charlie's daughter Annette from *his* first marriage, a baby of whom he had custody. Long before learning that she couldn't have children of her own, Carrie lavished mother love on little Annette. Touched, grateful—shamed, if he was capable of it—Charlie Slate stopped playing the field, emerging as model husband in a cornily solid marriage.

Jojo thinks domesticity is overrated and happy endings aren't all they're cracked up to be in the long run. However, she's strong in favor of all that good stuff for other people, especially nice ones like Carrie Slate, and she was as pleased and proud of the idyll as if she had arranged it. So when it threatened to come atumble, the plain fact is that Jojo panicked, stopped thinking right.

"*Not* like me, darling," she confesses. "What a *fool!*" But that's hindsight, following the killing and an arrest.

"Same old Jojo," said Carrie Slate. "Poverty doesn't make slums, people make them. This place is actively squalid, my dear." They were sitting in Jojo's dressing room at the Criterium Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue. Jojo had sent Carrie a matinee ticket for *Mind My Maid*, the hottest farce in London. "And as for that rubbish I've just sat through—"

"Keep it up," Jojo stopped her indistinctly, slathering cleansing cream on her face. They'd always been this way, sniping and slashing at each other, since teaming up as fellow boarders at Britain's bleakest convent school. There they'd been known as Bunter and Banter, a double act. (Billy Bunter is the legendary British fatty, a greedy schoolboy matched by his sister, Bessie Bunter, both immortalized in books, comic strips, and movies.) With half the duo overweight and the other half quick-witted and faster-tongued, the nicknames had been inevitable.

Phone chats were fun, but hardly counted—this was their first proper meeting in over a year. Behind genuine pleasure and kidding around, Jojo was concerned. Carrie's mother had surfaced again, warning that her daughter was in some sort of emotional plight and

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needed help. For once, the old girl seemed to be on target. For while Carrie looked fine—better than usual, if anything, a trace trimmer, elaborate new hairstyle nearly right, not-so-little black dress only a bit too young for her—something about her was skewed. With anyone else, Jojo would have feared that her friend was into cliche again, a matron unsure of her husband and making a valiant effort to woo him back.

But with the Slates, that was impossible. Yet something was amiss. Contrary to the song, you *can* lie to a liar—just don't try it with an actress. Jojo discerned that Carrie was playing her usual, carefree self, but badly.

When Jojo asked after Charlie and Annette, Carrie proposed, "Come down to Tollington, see for yourself—you haven't been for ages." A calculating look came into her slightly bulging eyes. "Why not this Saturday? You'd be a wow at the garden party. That sounds grand, but it's just a village affair to raise money for the Red Cross hut. You're almost famous and us Tollington folk are gullible enough to mistake you for a megastar."

"*Too* kind," Jojo cooed. She liked the country—right where it was, well distant from London. Carrie's house was surrounded by fields, real cows, woke to bird-noisy dawns, the whole ghastly bit. On the other hand, it would be a chance to coax Carrie into sharing her woes.

She made a snap decision, doubly generous—to her friend and to her understudy, a good kid, desperate for a chance to shine. "All right—Heather can go on for me Saturday and I'll come down to you for the great Tollington social event of the season."

Carrie collected her in a this-year's Jaguar outside Tollington station. Possibly because her friend was alert for it, Carrie seemed tenser and more abstracted still. Teasing and chatter spurted from her, but fitfully—it was like listening, Jojo thought, to a radio with a faulty connection somewhere.

The breakthrough came by chance. Carrie had just needled, "You're in danger of maturing into a geriatric swinger—you're a fixture in the gossip columns, but always with a different fellow. Why not pick a good husband?"

"Whose do you suggest?" Jojo inquired innocently. The big car shivered as though passing over ruts, but the lane was smoothly surfaced. Carrie's knuckles were yellowish, her blurred chinline suddenly tautened by a wince. Angry at her own clumsiness and enraged

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by Charlie Slate's conduct, Jojo mumbled, "Terrible old gag. I'm sorry, sweetie." Carrie's reaction signaled just one thing: Charlie was back at his old tricks, cheating on Carrie at last. It was wicked.

Her voice like ashes, Carrie said: "*You* wouldn't do that, break up a marriage, take somebody else's man."

Shaken, Jojo reeled out her standard, pass-foiling remark, which happened to be true. "The only married man I've ever slept with was married to *me* at the time." And then, "Listen, it may not be as—"

A stranger glanced away from the road. "Be a dear and just shut up," Carrie said. Then the harshness vanished and she smiled. "Let's just get this blasted party out of the way. It's Charlie's idea, of course. He still dreams of being the Squire of Tollington, bloody fool." Incredibly, affection as much as impatience colored her tone.

If Riverside House wasn't a mansion, it wasn't for want of trying. Seeing it from the train, strangers assumed it must be a Victorian hospital or hotel, there was so much of it looming and sprawling among the trees.

The Slates had remodeled the place since Jojo's previous visit, retreating into the main block and turning the two wings into self-contained, spacious homes which had sold for three times the cost of the building a decade or so earlier. Charlie Slate talked big money and his wife had a trick of making it.

Charlie was waiting on the steps of the pillared portico. Coarse features, Jojo noted, loathing him. Unfashionably long hair, dyed black but thinning. "Superbird!" he chortled as Jojo got out of the car. A deft turn of her chin stranded his wet kiss on her ear.

"Save it, Charlie, we're running late," his wife said wearily. "Jojo needs to prepare for her big entrance since she's opening this blessed jamboree. I see you're ready."

Indeed he was dressed for amateur dramatics—a period farce or an Edwardian regatta—pipestem trousers, stiff-collared shirt, gaudy blazer, a straw hat swept off for the guest and clamped under his arm. He glared at Carrie, an aged urchin. "What's wrong in a bit of fun, giving the yokels something to gape at?"

"It might work. Shame we're not holding a masquerade ball, though," Carrie tossed over her shoulder crisply as she marched indoors.

Jojo hung back. "What's the *matter* with you, idiot? If you don't

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give a damn for poor Carrie, have you *thought* what this will do to Annette?"

Slate's expression was ugly. The absurd straw hat squeaked abruptly as his whole body tensed. "Never mind my little girl. Don't *my* feelings count?" He sniggered sourly. "Silly me, of course they don't—that's what Women's Lib is about, right?"

From the hall, Carrie called impatiently. Her husband aimed a forefinger at Jojo. "It's not like her to wash dirty linen in public, but it's fine by me. Before you go back tomorrow, we'll have this out, the three of us!" And, half running, he made for a marquee across the vast green lake of shaven lawns.

It took her breath away. No denial, just selfish bluster. No fool like an old fool, of course, and Charlie must be pushing fifty. A destructive fool, a man obsessed.

At two o'clock, Jojo mounted her shaky rostrum (beer crates donated by the Shepherds' Arms) to officially open the Red Cross party. Already the grounds seethed, she was presiding over a blend of amiable, bloodless riot—rush hour at Piccadilly Circus and a country fair. There were stalls, sideshows, games, morris dancers, army cadets ready for a drill display, and, conquering all, an avalanche of Top Twenty pop tunes hurled from speakers slung in the ancient cedars.

The sunlight was unkindly explicit, though a huge picture hat took care of that and the brilliance had an interesting, see-through effect on her artfully simple cheesecloth dress. (Crowd reaction: "Cor! Look at *'er!*")

Jojo circulated, mingled, smiled, and gave autographs until her teeth dried and her fingers ached. She took token sips and nibbles of homemade lemonade, wine, and fancy cakes. She hefted an incontinent piglet to guess its weight, doing the cheesecloth no good at all, and nearly popped out of her bodice, to general acclaim, while hurling a ball down the skittle alley.

"You're a brick," Carrie told her, toward four o'clock. "You've earned a break." Unhooking a section of the chestnut fence temporarily rigged to keep the house private, she towed Jojo around to the rear of the building, overlooking the water. "Family and friends only—party within the party," she explained.

Kicking off her high heels, Jojo welcomed the balm of cool flagstones and sank onto the nearest free sun-lounger. A dozen or so people were on the terrace. She'd met most of them earlier and

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couldn't be bothered to sort them out just yet. Carrie returned, bearing iced Perrier, and perched, weightily, on another lounger. "Thanks, old dear, you did us proud."

"My bruises testify," Jojo agreed wryly. "Goodness, your sturdy sons of the soil pinch worse than Italians. *I* need the Red Cross."

Carrie wasn't listening, a reminder to Jojo that nothing was funny at Riverside House any more. Before she could follow up on that idea, Annette Slate plumped down beside her favorite honorary aunt. "You looked terrific, Jojo," she said. "I heard Sandy Gregor say he'd never rated older women before but now he's a believer."

"Lead me to him, darling. But not now—maybe the Twenty-first Century. You look pretty good yourself, you know." She was being kind—Annette was a pocket female version of her father, sharp-featured, nervy, no beauty-in-waiting. "Listen, I left my ciggies in my bedroom, would you be an angel and—?" Annette was off and running before Jojo finished the sentence.

Human nature made Jojo anxious to work out who The Other Woman could be. She could have asked Carrie, but recoiled from the idea. If Carrie wanted to pour it all out later, fine.

Meanwhile, knowing Charlie Slate, his lover would be here. Years of money and playing squire had made him idle and a homebody. He rarely strayed far from Riverside House. And since he seemed brazen about the affair, his mistress might well be easy to spot. Most sophisticated, reasonably sensitive women can watch another woman with a man and pick up the vibes.

First, she misquoted Mrs. Beaton's famous advice, catch your cheating louse. Where *was* Charlie? A shadow fell across her. A tall man was standing over them, hair tarnished gilt from hatless weeks in the open, tanned as much as anyone in England's temperate (i.e., vile) climate can manage from natural causes.

Carrie said, "Hello, Alf," with discourteous lack of enthusiasm. "Jojo, this is Alfred Dacre, he's some kind of traveling salesman." Dacre smiled uncertainly, brown-velvet eyes a trifle hurt.

"Yacht broker, actually," he confided to Jojo.

"Beg your pardon," Carrie muttered ungraciously. "You'll gather Alf has no sense of humor—don't call him Alfie, he thinks it's vulgar."

Embarrassed, Jojo smiled all the more warmly and let her hand rest in Dacre's paw. He didn't know what to do with it, pleasantly gauche and vulnerable for such a handsome man. He cleared his throat. "Suppose I ought to get back to the merry throng."

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Refusing the hint that he'd like to be contradicted, Carrie nodded woodenly. Snubbed and aware of it, he retreated in a hurry.

"Well," a faintly startled Jojo remarked, "you shut *him* up like a folding telescope. Punishment for making a pass?" She wasn't serious, it was an oblique attempt to raise morale—for who would make a pass at *Carrie*?—but her friend was taken aback, then scornful. "Alf is all wet, the dim of dims. They bought the west wing last summer—a shred of encouragement and they'll turn neighborly. Karen's decorative but he's impossible."

Jojo, sitting up on the lounger, scanned the terrace. Aha, there was Charlie, lounging against the low balustrade, heads together with a striking girl in shorts and halter. They seemed to have a lot to discuss, Slate gesturing strongly, she responding with what-can-I-tell-you apathy. Her India-ink hair fell rain-straight to her shoulders and she was pale as new ivory.

"That's Karen Dacre," said Carrie. "Quite a stunner, yes?" The comment's flavor was ambiguous, loaded with complex emotions. Karen Dacre had to be the one, Jojo concluded.

Nearly under her breath, she said: "We were all stunners at her age, darling. Charlie's welcome to her, the chump." Pure spite, on Carrie's behalf. All the same, Karen Dacre's ripe lips had an ill-tempered twist—there was a predatory, street-fighter aura about her.

Carrie was gaping at Jojo. "Welcome to her? But—" The rest of the sentence was choked back. Carrie hid her face in her hands.

Contrite, Jojo put an arm round her shoulders and whispered, "I spoke out of turn, Carrie. You needn't tell me anything, but I'll do whatever I can."

Nodding with a forced smile, Carrie stood up with an effort. "I'm slipping away to freshen up. Then if you can bear it, we'll do a final round of the stalls and call it a day. Everything must be just about sold or eaten or drunk by now and that canned music is driving me mad."

Is there anything more pathetic than a husband who doesn't know? Jojo wondered drearily.

The afternoon had fled and the cedars spread blue pools of shadow over battered grass, scurfy with discarded wrappings, raffle tickets, programs. Volunteers were striking the marquee and young Sandy Gregor plodded past, bearing an empty tea urn and looking far from

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cool. Alf Dacre, holding his lovely wife's hand and swinging it boyishly, faced Jojo and Carrie.

"Well done, Carrie—and Charlie, of course. Where is Charlie, anyway? Absentee landlords are all very well, but absentee hosts—Why don't you all come next door, ignore the debris, and get outside something tall, cool, and alcoholic?"

Karen's voice, thin and nasal, hardly matched the rest of the package.

"He went off on an errand—he must be around." Her husband released her hand to cup his own to his mouth and bellow, "Charlie! Come in, Number Six, your time is up!"

"Stop it, my head's splitting," Carrie said peevishly. Karen backed her with, "Everyone's looking, Alf."

"That's the idea," he pointed out cheerily, and shouted again—chest wide, head thrown back. Jojo, also nursing a headache, shut her eyes against the din, opened them again, and made a stillborn movement toward Carrie, who looked tired, hot, mussed, her skirt smeared. No, don't fuss, she stopped herself. She'll be changing for dinner soon enough.

Shouting wouldn't do it. One of the volunteers found Charlie an hour later when a serious search began. Jojo was with him when the man opened the door of a potting shed near the tennis court—and barged her away so roughly she nearly lost balance.

"Keep back, Miss Lorraine! Gawd, it's Mr. Slate and he's hurt himself." Which hardly did the situation justice. Charlie Slate was dead and he hadn't hurt himself. Not unless he was a double-jointed suicide who could make the weapon vanish.

He'd been shot once—more than enough as it turned out—through the back of the head.

Jojo felt most peculiar. It wasn't shock. She had seen death before, and escaped it narrowly herself for that matter. And despite the frilly, frivolous image she took such pains to project, she was a strong lady. But there was this weird sensation, like mental vertigo, an urge to grab something solid in everything she had heard and deduced and guessed at in the last handful of hours. Something wasn't right.

Carrie had fainted when the news was broken, and young Annette had fled to Jojo's arms. The girl couldn't take it in. She'd talked about anything and everything. Part of the something wrong—if Jojo could only get a handle on it—lay there, she sensed it. But

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what? There'd been so much and she had been less than half listening.

Annette had gabbled about Carrie and Jojo being friends at school and that old Bunter and Banter label. "I always took it for granted Mummy was Bunter and you were Banter—but it was the other way round, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Jojo conceded absently, "I was fat as a pig at school, always eating. People change as they get older—transform sometimes." Then Maria, the Slates' au pair girl, had come to take Annette off her hands.

Waiting to see Inspector Barrows, Jojo couldn't stop seeing cobwebs. Cliche cobwebs, horror-movie style, black and luxuriantly trailing as widows' weeds. The potting-shed tomb, unsurprisingly, had been full of empty clay pots, half a century's worth. Saving labor costs, Carrie had landscaped the garden on buying Riverside House, replacing most of the flower borders with grass. Spiders had been left in peace, using shelf upon shelf of pottery as cliff dwellings.

Some of the cobwebs had dragged free when Charlie collapsed and had veiled much of his face. Jojo shuddered, crying out at the touch on her shoulder. "Like to step in now, Miss Lorraine?" It was a policewoman, openly interested in the celebrity. "My mum never missed that series of yours, she'll be ever so bucked to hear I've met you."

Riverside House's recreation room had been turned into the police incident room, ping-pong table starting to fill up with reports in thin card jackets, a blackboard brought in and chalked with assignments and names.

Detective Inspector Barrows—swarthy, neat, neutral—explained, "We'll talk it through, if that's agreeable, and then comes the formal statement. From other statements, we're getting a rough idea of everyone's movements. You, for instance, were very much on public view from the moment you declared the fete, or whatever we term it, officially open." He settled in. "Now, when did you last see Mr. Slate?"

"On the terrace, sometime after four this afternoon. He was talking to Mrs.—"

"Dacre, Karen Dacre," the policeman supplied instantly.

"Yes, but then—" Jojo gestured helplessly "—Carrie said something to me and then Charlie wasn't there any more. I never saw him again. Except for that glimpse, when he was dead."

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Barrows pondered that for an instant before asking, not entirely casually, "And what about Mrs. Slate?"

"What about her? She was with me all the time. Why single Carrie out? Anyone could have wandered in and—"

"Don't get het up, Miss Lorraine," he protested good-naturedly. "I'm singling nobody out—just getting the hang of things." He hesitated. "Though it's no secret that when a spouse dies by violence their partner is prime suspect. For the good reason that, overwhelmingly, they turn out to be responsible. If responsible's the word."

"It's impossible, Carrie was with me," Jojo repeated stubbornly.

"Not all the time," he contradicted, still calm, schoolmasterly. "You went to the bathroom on your ownsome, I daresay. And when the deceased's daughter returned with those cigarettes you'd sent her to fetch she found you alone on the terrace. And so it goes."

Where it went, Jojo saw, was the potting shed less than five hundred yards from the house, and Carrie slipping away, not to freshen up but to murder Charlie. In the party's din a pistol shot wouldn't draw attention and the whole thing could be over within five minutes.

"Point taken," Jojo assured him serenely, "but we were within sight or sound of each other for all but *moments*. There just wasn't time for Carrie to—*do* anything."

Barrows gave her a straight look, mingling disappointment, criticism, reassessment. "Very well, the sergeant will take your statement to that effect. But I urge you to have a little think. There's a lot on your mind. You're a good actress, which is as it should be, but I can tell that much. Sort things out—don't hesitate to add anything if needs be."

Her eyebrows raised in polite and exquisite puzzlement, Jojo folded her hands in her lap and stared him out.

Statement made (no outright falsehoods, but more care involved than the county CID sergeant dreamed), Jojo left the incident room and began what seemed a very taxing climb upstairs to her friend's bedroom.

She had been Bunter at school and Carrie, Banter. Then the roles reversed. Something there. A man and a woman together—another woman could tell if they were lovers. Something there as well. Put it all together, Jojo had to grab the polished mahogany handrail, dizzy from the impact of sudden revelation.

She'd never been in any doubt that Carrie had killed Charlie.

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Knowledge by instinct. But that ugly smear on the back of Carrie's full white skirt—a cobweb, not there earlier in the afternoon, making Jojo itch to brush it off—was an additional reason for certainty.

Charlie Slate had got what he deserved. Selfish, cruel, he'd been prepared to smash his wife and daughter's happiness to grab his own with a younger woman. Carrie, no longer young, already let down by one husband, had every excuse to break under the strain, lash out in lethal frenzy.

Jojo wasn't her sister's keeper. Nor would she be judge, far less prosecutor or betrayer.

The bedroom door was open. Carrie called to Jojo, "At last—come in!" Changed into a dressing gown, she was lying on top of the coverlet, her face swollen and her eyes grotesquely red.

Jojo bent and kissed her cheek. Her stomach turned over and her nostrils flared. She sat down with a thump on the pretty chair beside the bed. "Oh, *Carrie*—soap!"

Carrie heaved up and rearranged herself against the bedhead, capable hands locked around her knees. "Come again, old dear?"

"You rubbed soap in your eyes, for the tears. I can smell it. All that stuff with Alf Dacre, putting him down at the top of your voice. I was staring so hard in the wrong direction that it didn't register. You and *Alf*, you're an item, you're having an affair with him."

"What an imagination," Carrie sneered. "Fat old me, the frump's frump, and a dishy man with a sexy wife?" Ears tuned belatedly, Jojo caught the hidden note of smug incredulity.

Nauseated, scared—something lay on the bed, not the woman she'd never really known—she pleaded, "Stop it. When you shied away from that other-woman's-husband thing in the car, you were thinking of you and Dacre. Charlie wasn't the cause. And the stuff about me never doing it—what a moron, I fooled myself, you didn't have to bother! You meant you intended to do *exactly* that: get Karen's man, no matter what."

Another memory made Jojo chill with dismay. "Charlie thought I knew, that I was telling him to step aside."

"Shut the door and keep your voice down," Carrie said.

Jojo didn't stir, so the other woman got out of bed and closed the door. She spoke coldly. "You're a shallow, promiscuous moron and a prig along with it. So shocked! I *love* Alf. Meeting him turned the world upside down. I need him and care about him, far far more than I care about Annette, or cared about Charlie. *Love*, my dear—you wouldn't understand."

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Thank you, thought Jojo. Unaware of drawing blood, Carrie whispered, "We wouldn't have been harming anyone—Karen's another generation, they expect marriages to break up sooner or later. Alf was ready to tell her when I gave the word."

Lips stiff, Jojo said, "But Charlie wasn't ready."

"I'd have paid him off, he could have had everything! We don't need possessions. But, no, Charlie caved in and kept whining about how he loved me, as if my lack of love for *him* was—nothing." She grabbed Jojo's arm. "It was the kindest way, Charlie couldn't bear me leaving him—*so I didn't.* He left me. He's better off wherever he went."

She meant it, too. Peeling Carrie's fingers away, Jojo faltered, "You've been planning this for ages. You even planned *me*—I was invited to draw the crowds, pack the place with suspects so you wouldn't be the only person who could have done it."

Carrie's coldly amused stare made her shut up. "You're a mass of vanity," Carrie accused. "Me, me, me—your theme music. But this is about *me. Me* getting a chance after a lifetime of humdrum second-best. 'Isn't she lucky, some Cockney guttersnipe marries the fat old frump for her money and out of the goodness of his great big heart he actually stays faithful.' The hell with that!"

Her hand clamped on Jojo's arm again, burning. "Tell the police—see if I care! They can't prove it." Then the grip relaxed and Carrie conjured up a ghost of that girl at convent school. "I had to, Jojo. I didn't kill him for the fun of it—there was no other way."

Fleeing the room and the stranger in it, Jojo ran full tilt into Inspector Barrows at the foot of the stairs.

"Here, here, here, this won't do," he soothed, frowning the policewoman away and drawing Jojo into a side room, sitting her down. The large handkerchief was produced with a magician's flourish. "Blow hard—make the elephant trumpet, that's what I used to tell my kiddies."

Kindness made her burst into tears all over again. "I gather," Barrows said drily, "you've had that little think."

Jojo shook her head mutely, less denial than a plea for time. He said comfortably, "No hurry. This may help you see your way ahead. Mr. Dacre's just finished a long statement made of his own accord—I couldn't have shut him up if I'd tried. He claims that he and Mrs. Slate have been lovers for months.

"Marriage was discussed. He was willing, and though she talked

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wildly—Dacre's saying now he discounted her talk and I think that's true—he believed that Mr. Slate would see the inevitable and agree to a divorce. Mr. Dacre's naive and an optimist. In other words, a bloody fool."

She laughed shakily, winning an encouraging grin. "A fool," the policeman resumed, "but not silly enough to risk getting dragged in as accomplice. He couldn't wait to tell me it was nothing to do with him, but the widow *did* have pressing motives to be free of the late husband. He thinks she arranged to meet her husband out of sight, shot him, and slid back to the party after slinging the gun in the river. My frogmen may find it, but I'm not holding my breath. Even if they do, it'll be unregistered, no fingerprints."

Inspector Barrows shook her arm gently. It seemed to be Jojo's day for that. "Your pal Mrs. Slate is tougher than meets the eye. She'll insist on having her lawyer present during interrogation and she just might get away with a callous, evil piece of work.

"Cards on the table, I've told you why I know she could and very probably did butcher Mr. Slate. You're certain she did, I got that impression for all your poker face earlier. Did you see her go into the shed—d'you have any evidence at all?"

Jojo stared at him disbelievingly. "No, it was just a cobweb on the skirt of her frock, and that's probably gone by now, she'd have seen it when she took the dress off. That, and things she said just now."

Barrows, setting his hands on his knees, sighed heavily. "The long haul, then. I hate that, battering away at a woman."

Give me patience, thought Jojo. It was out of her hands now, she could do a Pilate, disclaim responsibility. It gave her no pleasure—she felt every year of her age, and futile besides. She muttered, "You don't need my piffling evidence and suspicions and nonsense. Can't you *see*? Just tell Carrie that her precious Alf Dacre couldn't wait to turn her in—she'll tell you the rest."

Five minutes afterward, Inspector Barrows learned that Jojo, for the first time in the whole sorry mess, had got it dead right.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

A most serviceable setting for the classic detective story is the house party, in which one of a defined and limited number of people dispatches some of the others, challenging the (usually) amateur sleuth fortuitously on the premises. Greater suspense and terror can be supplied if the party is isolated—truly limiting the number of suspects and potential victims and, more importantly, preventing escape and the arrival of help. Perhaps the most memorable novel of this sort was Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1940), which in succeeding film versions was transmogrified from the original remote island to a snowed-in mountain retreat to a desolate desert hotel.

Samuel Holt (the author) remembers these things in his third adventure, *What I Tell You Three Times Is False* (Tor, $14.95). Holt (the character) is a former Long Island cop who became a hugely successful TV private eye, and now, eternally typecast and thereby rendered unemployable, he lounges on his money until something interesting comes along. Something interesting, in this case, is an invitation to a Caribbean island where a fund-raising film is to be shot for a charitable organization. Other actors include a woman established in film as Miss Marple and two men better known for their roles as Sherlock Holmes and Charlie Chan. A hurricane provides the isolation and a murderer begins to decimate the gathering. Good nostalgic enjoyment available here.

John Katzenbach's debut, *In the Heat of the Summer* (1982), was a remarkable achievement. I think his second, *The Traveler* (Putnam, $18.95), is very nearly as good. Mercedes Barron is a police detective in Miami. An early-morning call shocks her with news that her beloved niece is the latest victim of the city's serial killer. Said killer is shortly captured and makes no secret of his "righteous" acts. Many cases closed, including the niece's. Mercedes, alone, thinks it should still be open, thinks vengeance must yet be hers. Meanwhile, a celebrated news photographer, Douglas Jeffers, a self-aware psychopath, has enslaved a "Boswell" and set out with her on an odyssey of death. Barron and Jeffers, and others, critically others, will come eventually together in an explosive, revealing finale. This is graphic, frequently breathless storytelling, which I suspect would make a devastating film.

E. X. Giroux continues her good series about barrister Robert Forsythe in *A Death for a Dilettante* (St. Martin's, $13.95). The titular character is Winslow Penndragon, who has devoted a lifetime to sin-

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gleminded hedonism, apparently shielded from just deserts by his debonair manner. But harvest time comes, and Forsythe's presence at Penndragon's estate does not prevent someone from beating Winslow to death. Solving the crime requires Forsythe to dip into the sewer of Penndragon's life, an experience he does not relish. Giroux's narrative is quite effective, even if her cast is largely unsympathetic.

Britain's Frederick Nolan sets his latest international-intrigue yarn, *Red Center* (St. Martin's, $15.95), on our shores. British Intelligence keeps a few covert folks in the U.S., just to make sure they don't miss out on anything. One of them is David Caine, who gets wind of a massive Soviet scheme. The Red agent in charge appears to be Guchkov, allegedly a defector from Moscow and certainly the person who arranged the death, years before, of Caine's wife. So Caine also has a personal interest. And then, when he sniffs in the wrong quarters, his own survival becomes a prime interest as well. Gripping spy stuff.

Robert B. Gillespie departs from his series about newspaper executive Ralph Simmons and instead, in *The Hell's Kitchen Connection* (Dodd Mead, $15.95), offers us Ed Carey, seminary dropout and N.Y.C. editor for a newspaper syndicate. One of Carey's clients is the much unloved Tom Costigan, once a Federal prosecutor who now attacks crime through his column. Costigan has a daughter, Alice, whom Carey finds much easier to love, if not make love to. Among the enemies Costigan has made is evidently one with a supply of grenades, and Costigan's detonation begins a notable series of deaths which bids fair to include Alice and Ed before he can figure out who's behind the action. This is a three-ring circus of blood and weaponry, not too easy to believe but a dynamic and suspenseful tale.

John Sherwood, writing busily in his seventies, brings back his amateur detective Celia Grant in *The Mantrap Garden* (Scribners, $13.95). Celia, who operates a nursery, is of an appearance and normal manner that causes the unwary to underestimate her. Here she's wanted as a pliant member of the board of Monk's Head, a historic garden created by famed English horticulturist Gertrude Jekyll. A more tranquil setting can hardly be imagined. Except that inattention, insufficient funds, and vandals have descended upon the Mead, its matriarchal owner has recently died in circumstances smelling of euthanasia, and her son-in-law, Sir Julian, is taking all this strangely indeed. Soon Celia is confounding the expectations of all, deep in affairs also involving modern espionage, World War II, and the poetry of one of that war's casualties. Most agreeable.

An excellent array of paperback reprints is also at hand. Choice titles include these from Dell: *Fete Fatale* and *A Little Local Murder* by Robert Barnard and *Dead Giveaway* and *Tickled to Death* by Simon Brett ($3.50 each). From Signet: *An April Shroud* by Regin-

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ald Hill and *Prima Donna At Large* by Barbara Paul ($3.50 each). From Bantam: *C Is for Corpse* by Sue Grafton and *The Lucky Stiff* by Craig Rice ($3.50 each), plus *The Penguin Pool Murder* by Stuart Palmer ($2.95). From Mysterious Press: *Another Part of the City* by Ed McBain and *The Hot Rock* by Donald E. Westlake ($3.95 each). From Henry Holt: *Johnny Under Ground* by Patricia Moyes ($3.95). From Pocket Books: *The Burglar in the Closet* ($3.50) by Lawrence Block (which inspired the current film *Burglar*) and *The Staked Goat* by Jeremiah Healy ($3.95). From Academy: *Murder in Mind* (originally *Fantasy and Fugue*) by Roy Fuller and *Die All, Die Merrily* by Leo Bruce ($4.95 each). From Penguin: *Very Cold for May* by William P. McGivern and *My Name Is Michael Sibley* by John Bingham ($5.95 each), and *The Wisdom of Father Brown* and *The Secret of Father Brown* by G. K. Chesterton ($4.95 each—all four in the Classic Crime series). Also from Penguin: *Ground Money* by Rex Burns, *Hardcover* by Wayne Warga, *Natural Enemy* by Jane Langton, and *Saratoga Longshot* by Stephen Dobyns ($3.95 each), as well as *Dead on a Stick* by Robert Upton, *The Tartan Sell* by Jonathan Gash, and *A Criminal Comedy* by Julian Symons ($3.50 each).

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

BRAVO, FLORENCE

by LILLIAN de la TORRE

What will become of Charles Bravo?
His life isn't worth a centavo
Now that Florence, his wife,
Has designs on his life
And there's chloroform on the lavabo.

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a *NEW* short story by

NELL LAMBURN

"Her'll be the death of you, the old woman will." Black Billy's soft voice wreathed the kitchen, the sour smell of him permeating even that of the bacon and eggs she had cooked for him. "You put her in a Home afore tis too late."

"Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't do that!" Helen stared in terrible agitation at the door, as if her mother might suddenly materialize to accuse her. "She's my mother!"

"Maybe, maybe." His huge, engrained hands dwarfed the yellow-daisied mug. "You put her in a Home—afore tis too late."

A story as moody, frightening, and different as "Tom's Thatch," which you rated third in your vote for best story published in EQMM in 1986 . . .

NODONS' DOG

BY NELL LAMBURN

When Black Billy came to the estate, the women, scared, hurried to bring him their blunted blades as, in another ancient age, they might have brought placatory gifts to ensure his goodwill and departure.

But in the big house, Major Picthorne cried out hastily to his dogs, bolted all the doors, and watched and waited in silent, helpless rage while the setters whined and howled and scrabbled at the door as if their hearts would break.

For Helen Bradshaw, there was fear, too, and a tortured pleasure that tightened her throat and knocked her heart out of its dull rhythm as nothing else ever had. Giving food to Black Billy was danger, defiance, revolution, to be savored in all its piquancy: to be

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anticipated yet relieved when it was over. Her one attempt to be a person in her own right, to be free, to take her destiny into her own hands without the trammels of her mother's dependence, and she knew it set her apart from the other women around her. As in olden times, the wise man's acolyte was shunned a little, metaphorical skirts drawn aside.

There was no pattern to his infrequent coming. No one knew where he came from or where he went. One time she would turn into the little estate and see his ancient bicycle propped up on the path to one of the bungalows, the knife blade flashing as he pedaled the whirling stone. On another, she'd let up the kitchen blind on a Sunday morning and there he'd be, waiting as motionless as one of the beeches in the Forest that pressed against the estate boundary for her to open the kitchen door.

He wasn't old but he wasn't young, either. His oval face was extraordinarily pale, his eyes so narrow they appeared to have no whites at all. The nostrils of his long sharp nose flared back to expose little dark hairs, and the grey stubble across his jaw seemed to have solidified to an unchanging density. His glistening black hair, drawn back from his high forehead, was indented by the band of his flat-crowned, wide-brimmed hat. Such a curious hat, Helen Bradshaw thought fancifully, a sort of clerical hat like those Italian cardinals wore. And with his long black coat, he might indeed be a priest. But a priest of what religion she wasn't sure.

Her mother hated him. But Helen would defend her hospitality with a bright firmness not echoed in the rapid pulse in her throat.

"I *like* to say thank you! He sharpens the knives better than anyone else. And see how beautifully sharp the garden tools are—why, I can mow the lawn in no time when Billy's finished with those blades!"

"But there's no need to have him in the house! He's filthy. It's not safe. You all alone there with him—why, anything could happen! You tell her, Major! She'll listen to you."

For sometimes on a Sunday afternoon, if her mother felt able, they would walk into the Forest for a little way and Major Picthorne, trailing the flowing mantle of setters behind him, would turn and walk with them. He would raise his checked cap and inquire solicitously over Mrs. Bradshaw's health, and smile, his teeth remarkably white and even for a man of his years. But his washed-blue eyes, with their fringe of sandy lashes so pale as to appear nonexistent, would note the increasing severity of Mrs. Bradshaw's

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twisting hands and halting steps, note the deepening lines of strain about her daughter's mouth, and be well pleased.

But in answer to the appeal, he would straighten his shoulders with a little rolling motion and say, his voice as clipped as his moustache, "Your mother is right. *I* won't have him in the house. You know nothing about him. You can't trust a man like that. *Any*thing could happen." The innuendo was so faint as to be barely detectable, but it was there and Helen would perspire a little in embarrassment between her bony shoulder blades and duck her head away to frown into the bramble-laced Forest, while her mother, emboldened by the alliance, cried:

"There you are! I told you so! You just listen to the Major! If the Major won't have him, then *you* shouldn't, Helen. The Major knows it's not safe."

But Helen Bradshaw knew otherwise. She knew it was because of the dogs. Because of Clara, in particular.

It had happened one early-spring Sunday. With her mother settled in the sun lounge, she had escaped into the Forest, but she hadn't been alone in the Grand Avenue. Winter-pale people had been enticed by that first warmth which sets backs stretching, stiff legs moving more easily, deep intaken breath caressing instead of chilling. The sharp tight buds of the beech trees had unfurled just enough to dust the branches with their fragile green, saplings crowding into a verdant cloud.

Without the sea anchor of her mother, she had walked quickly and gladly, like a dog loosed from its leash, but on seeing Major Picthorne in front, she had hesitated uncertainly. How dreadful if he thought she were following him! But before she could turn back, she had glimpsed Black Billy beyond him, and the familiar excitement and fear had immobilized her. He was cycling slowly, the tails of his long coat dangling perilously close to the back wheel, his black hat precarious on his head, the pale moon of the sharpening stone like the peculiar horn of some mythical beast between the antlers of the handlebars.

The people moved hastily aside to let him pass, their curious glances stretching out to follow him. But Major Picthorne did not deviate. He walked on, straight on, and Black Billy, despite the width of the Avenue, pedaled right at him.

Helen's throat had tightened beneath its pink woolly scarf, some awful premonition gripping her about the neck so that her hands had flown up as if they could actually loose the constriction.

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At the very last moment, Major Picthorne had stepped hastily aside and Black Billy was past. But not done. Suddenly he'd begun to whistle. Just a few notes, no tune. And the red setters, like glowing russet leaves, had drifted from the trees toward him.

It seemed to her then as if the whole Forest held its breath. Because the setters never, but never, followed anyone else, never even approached anyone else, for their master was their pivot, their lodestar, their man-god. And everyone who lived thereabouts knew it.

Major Picthorne had turned on his polished heel, then, naked shock distorting his face. His whistle sliced the still air, but the setters did not turn. They loped beside the bicycle, their lovely stupid heads raised to gaze at Black Billy's face. His laughing face. Helen had never seen him laugh, ever, but now his brown lips stretched wide over stained intermittent teeth and his laugh grunted as the whistle blasted again. In vain.

Alongside now, his triumphant glance roped her, securing her as an ally with the dexterity of lassoing a beast. Motionless, Helen felt the warmth, the early-spring hope, chill into pale ice because she was witness to Major Picthorne's public humiliation. It was something, she was convinced, he would not forget.

Then Black Billy had bent, and the setters dropped away from him one by one, only Clara, the youngest, the loveliest, the favorite, remaining—until she, too, with a human reluctance, slowed and stopped and gazed mournfully after the black, receding figure.

But they didn't return to their master. In a final gesture of disobedience, they melted once again amongst the smooth grey trunks, and betrayal and humiliation and fear of the power that had suborned his handmaidens scoured Major Picthorne so violently that he could barely breathe with the pain.

From then on, the dogs were never about when Black Billy came to the estate. And when Mrs. Bradshaw cried, "Promise you won't ask him again—promise me, Helen! For my sake!" she could not promise because she was more frightened of antagonizing Black Billy than she was of her mother's anger.

And he knew that. Just as he knew that Mrs. Bradshaw was inexorably sapping her daughter's life away. It sometimes seemed, in an odd sort of way, as if there wasn't much he didn't know. "Her'll be the death of you, the old woman will." His soft voice wreathed the kitchen, the sour smell of him permeating even that of the bacon and eggs she had cooked for him. "You put her in a Home afore tis too late."

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"Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't do that!" She stared in terrible agitation at the door, as if her mother might suddenly materialize to accuse her. "She's my mother!"

"Maybe, maybe." His huge, engrained hands dwarfed the yellow-daisied mug. "You put her in a Home—afore tis too late."

But she couldn't. For the Home was Mrs. Bradshaw's personal incubus. It slept with her, ate with her, feeding off her increasing dependence on daughter and neighbor until its bulk threatened to consume her entirely. She would wake moaning in the night, not from pain but fear: her craving for reassurance was inexhaustible, fastening, with its hydra lips, to Helen's heart so that her daughter's love became emaciated from constant outpourings of reassurance.

"You won't put me in—in one of *those* places?" "Of course not, Mother!"

"You promise me?" "I promise."

"But you might, dear, I'm such a burden." "I *love* you, Mother!"

"I'm ruining your life—you'll hate me for it one day!" "I'm perfectly *happy,* Mother!"

"But I dreamed—" "Dreams go by opposites."

"Dr. Keeble says—" "*I'm* looking after you, not Dr. Keeble."

"You do love your old mother, then?" "Yes, yes, I love you."

But alone in her room, the tears would slither slowly down her thinning cheeks, as if they, too, were quite exhausted by the emotional drain, and she would turn hastily from the despair reflected in her pretty gilt mirror as if it might leave a telltale stain that her mother would detect.

And every morning, at 8:25 A.M. precisely, just as she had for twenty-five years, she'd kiss her mother goodbye and begin the one-and-a-half-mile walk down Marlborough Hill to the pleasant offices of Sedgewick and Minor, Estate Agents. And every evening at 5:35 P.M., she would walk home again to cook their frugal supper and listen to the monotonous saga of her mother's arthritic day. And if, as the years passed, the hill appeared a little steeper and her mother's condition a great deal worse, then she tried, with quiet desperation, not to notice.

But Major Picthorne did. From the landing window of the substantial house in whose garden the estate of bungalows had been built, he watched and waited and bided his time.

He abominated those bungalows. He had never surmounted the shock of returning from that obscure, Far-Eastern posting to find

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the wall, a blatant brick-red wound across the lawn. Beyond, where the shrubbery and the elms had been, leviathan diggers lay, half submerged in glutinous white pools of chalk mud.

"Needs must, Arthur," his mother had whined. "I'm not a rich woman, you know." But the continuo of the complaint had been delicious spite, and so he had contained his rage and when she died he had flushed her ashes down the lavatory. The one that had once been the servants'.

Over the years, the wall had mellowed under a color wash of Virginia creeper and forsythia and pyracantha, and the adolescent awkwardness of the new buildings had matured with their pretty weeping cherries and rowans and the mottled camouflage of countless hostas. But Major Picthorne still hated them. Often, late in the evening, he would unlock the gate in the wall and walk angrily about the paths and lawns, the red setters, like shadows loosed from their host, gliding around him. Inside the bungalows, the people would sense him but they wouldn't complain. Wouldn't look at each other, either. Just, occasionally, twitch the curtains in impotent resentment.

But Mrs. Bradshaw understood. Or thought she did. Poor Major Picthorne. Poor lonely man. It was a shame, living in that big house all by himself except for those dogs. Beautiful dogs, with their glowing coats and feathery tails. Still, only dogs.

"Such a *gentle*man," she would sigh. "So kind, so thoughtful. I wonder he hasn't married. All alone in that big house. Such a waste."

Her implication was so clear that her daughter's throat would flutter in an embarrassment of uncertainty and she would reply hastily, "I'm sure he's quite happy, Mother. *Quite* happy."

Later on, when Mrs. Bradshaw could no longer walk more than a few steps, the Major would take the handles of the wheelchair for a hundred yards or so.

"Oh, please—you mustn't!" Helen protested, breathlessly at first, her woolly-gloved hands battling ineffectually for possession of the grips.

"And why not? It would be a pleasure. I so admire you both—such independence. So refreshing in a society that reneges its responsibilities at the first opportunity."

"Oh, Helen wouldn't do that!" Mrs. Bradshaw shrilled, her neck twisting agitatedly, like a bird who senses the poulterer's knife. "She's promised—haven't you, Helen? No Home—she's promised that, you know!"

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And at the awful familiar panic, Helen pressed her mother's bony shoulder in despairing comfort. "I'll always look after you, Mother, you *know* that."

And if Major Picthorne's nod carried more than the necessary quota of satisfaction, she did not notice it.

If old Mr. Sedgewick hadn't died when he did, just a week after the firm's amalgamation with Drew and Garnet, perhaps things might have been different. But on the Friday following the funeral, Helen Bradshaw was given two weeks' notice. It was, they told her with their patent-leather smiles, to do with a "new approach," more "dynamic image," "fresh blood," "streamlining." The property business was a "growth industry," "hard sell" was vital, she would find it difficult to adapt at her age.

The phrases ricocheted off her shock-numb mind as meaningless as they were intended. She could not tell her mother.

"It could be flu," feverishly she excused her behavior. "I could be sickening for flu."

"You take care," Mrs. Bradshaw bleated, metaphorically backing away. "You don't want to get ill. You mustn't be ill, you know. You look after yourself."

For my sake. That's what her mother should have added. *Because if you get ill, who's going to look after me?*

At the end of the two weeks, they presented Helen with a crystal vase in a sorry little ceremony she'd rather forget. There were carnations on her desk, too, their stiff pert petals the particular nauseous pink emulated by cake-icing manufacturers, and glasses of that heavy brown sherry which lingers about the teeth. They watched her, yet couldn't meet her eye. They wanted her gone—and so, with uncharacteristic perversity, she lingered.

But on the way home, she left the vase outside the Charity shop and laid the flowers on some ancient grave, where they lay, incongruous, like a tart on an old man's bed.

Once, when she'd been small, her father had taken her to Bristol Zoo. Some bird of prey, she didn't know which, had suddenly flailed against its bars in a paroxysm of despairing rage. The outthrust neck, the burning yellow eyes, the broken feathers beyond the bars—the image had engulfed her in guilt and pity and helplessness until she'd run away, sobbing uncontrollably, unable to explain, and her father had taken her home, hurt and angry at her ungrateful behavior.

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But there was no running away from her mother, trapped behind the bars of her illness, as she raged against the news of her daughter's dismissal. But the guilt, the pity, and the helplessness, they engulfed a thousand-fold.

"What did you do *wrong?*" "Nothing, Mother, *nothing!*"

"But you must have—after twenty-five years!" "Mr. Sedgewick died, they want new people, young people."

"But it's not fair! You've given everything to that firm." *And to you, Mother!* "Life isn't fair. I'll get another job. You mustn't *worry,* Mother!"

But she didn't get another job. She wasn't able to drive, the shackles of her mother's illness chained her to the town, and her age, her limited skills, her very nature handicapped her in the struggle for the few local jobs available. And in the evenings, in the kitchen, she laid out the bills against the State's kindly though conditional benefits in a ghastly game of patience that never was resolved.

Her mother, sensing disaster, moaned accusingly, "You'll put me in a Home! You'll have to put me in a Home! We can't afford to live here—I'll have to go into a Home!"

But Helen only folded her arms round the thin, shaking shoulders and whispered again and again, *"No,* Mother! Whatever happens, I promise you I won't put you in a Home. I promise—I promise—"

Though how she was going to keep that promise, she did not know.

But Major Picthorne did. With increasing satisfaction, he watched her set out for the Job Centre, each time her step a little slower, her shoulders a little more defeated. The time, he decided, running his fingers with a slow voluptuousness through Clara's silky coat, cupping the dome of her head as another man might cup the small perfection of a breast, the time was almost ripe.

It all happened so smoothly, so naturally. He was going to move house, he explained—his own was too large. Perhaps Miss Bradshaw could assist him? She had such experience, he would be honored. His muted gallantry flustered her, but Mrs. Bradshaw, perception honed sharp by terror of the future, quickly snapped shut her acceptance and the first link was about her.

He was much too discreet to offer money for her time, but instead there were lunches, quiet drinks in obscure pubs, and, for those more distant properties, because they could no longer afford their neighbor's help, *Mrs.* Bradshaw's company, too. Her daughter, banished to the back seat, would marvel at her mother's animation, the

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flushed cheek and cocked head, the girlish giggle. Just now and then, Major Picthorne would turn and smile quickly, conspiratorially, pink lips drawn back from white teeth. Or, at some awkwardly approached house, Mrs. Bradshaw would remain in the car, coyly content. And if he, on these occasions, seemed to linger or urge yet another stroll about the gardens, her daughter, in increasing apprehension, tried not to notice.

Now it was she who awoke moaning in the night, terror of the future, of her impossible promise to her mother, suffocating her so that she needs must thrust off the pink blankets to stumble to the window, gulping the cold air to revive her. Once, she was sure, she saw Black Billy out there—a darkness darker than the darkness itself, the reluctant glint of an old bicycle spoke, the half moon of a pale cheek. She froze, staring until her eyes watered, her creping throat bare above the scoop of her sensible nightie—and her heart had begun to bump quite dreadfully.

Then, from across the wall, the dogs began to howl and a light, two lights, flashed on in the big house, and she snatched the flowered curtains tight together as if the Major's pale-washed eyes could see right into the bedroom. She scurried back to her narrow bed, trembling, and held the blankets high up to her chin. After a while, the dogs ceased their crying and she slept uneasily.

If it had been Black Billy, he'd be there, surely, in the morning! But when she let up the kitchen blind there was no one, and pin-sharp disappointment pricked her eyes and made them water. It was *months* since he'd last been to the estate—five months, by the pretty Dairy calendar hung beside the spice rack. Stupid to feel almost—well, deserted, really—but she did. Because Black Billy wouldn't know what to do. He'd tell her to put her mother in a Home just as he always did. Except, she remembered, as the awful familiar panic crept from where sleep had banished it, he did know so many things—so many, many things.

Mr. Robinson at the Bank was very nice, really. It was just that—well, she could see the figures for herself and still a tidy sum to pay on the mortgage. Perhaps if they moved to Swindon? They'd got to look to the long-term future, too, hadn't they? A nice little ground-floor flat and a home help—that made sense, didn't it? Jobs were easier to obtain in Swindon, after all. And if the worst came to the worst—

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"Oh, no! No, I *promised!*" Helen scurried toward the door as if Mr. Robinson were the devil himself tempting her. "I couldn't do that—"

And Mr. Robinson said, sadly, slowly, "Some promises, my dear, have to be broken. Sometimes it's the only way."

The hill seemed extraordinarily steep that early-spring afternoon. In fact, she had to pause three times, her legs answering her mind's commands like a reluctant child, her breath heaving out from the painful thumping of her heart. The thickets chattered their bare twigs as she passed, like a watching crowd. And when she turned into the estate, she saw that every window of the bungalow was ablaze with light.

Something was wrong! She began to run—a stumbling, uncoordinated run—scrabbled at the lock with her key, and heard her mother's high "company" laugh as she flung open the sitting-room door.

"Helen! Helen, dear! Guess what has happened?" Mrs. Bradshaw's cheeks were aflame, her crippled fingers balled about the fine stem of a tall, unfamiliar glass, and behind her, one hand firmly on the wheelchair handle, Major Picthorne was smiling, his pink lips parting just a little to show his even, white teeth. "The Major wants to marry you, Helen! He's asked for your hand in marriage, dear! We're going to live in his new house and he's going to take care of me—I'll never have to go into a Home, dear, *ever!*"

Helen stared—not at Major Picthorne, but at her triumphant mother. She could not answer, could not even speak. Her mother had *known!* Her mother had anticipated this! Her mother had connived at it, actually encouraged it!

She opened her mouth to cry, *No! No! No!* and saw a terrible mortal fear crush Mrs. Bradshaw's excited face into a pulp of despair. So instead she whispered helplessly, impotently,

"Oh—thank you. How—how very kind of you."

And behind her the front door clicked shut with a terrible, quiet finality.

Black Billy came to the bungalow the night before the wedding.

"I'll not stay." He stood by the table, one hand laid flat on its shiny white surface, the other in the pocket of his long black coat, and he seemed to fill the whole room. "I brought thee something—for thee, not him. Tis a secret—not for him, see?"

"How did you know?" Stupid question. He knew so many things.

He grunted. "Bad news travels fast."

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She began to cry. "It was the only way—it was the only way! Mother won't have to go into a Home, ever! She's got her own room at—at the new house. He's been very kind, she'll be safe—what else could I do?"

For answer he placed something small on the table. She scrubbed at her eyes like a child. It was a dog. Not more than two inches high and twice as long. It lay, legs tucked beneath its stubby clay body, its head up, just a little turned toward her, and though its eyes were quite blank Helen had the strangest feeling it could see her, was watching her.

Just as Black Billy was watching her.

"You take 'n. Hide 'n well. Doan let him touch 'n. Mustn't see 'n."

"But what—what am I to do with it then?" she whispered. "I don't understand."

"'Tis Nodons' dog. You give 'n to Nodons when things get bad. Nodons'll help—you ask Nodons."

The name, repetitive, unfamiliar, darted about her muddled mind and she cried again, sharply, querulously. "I don't understand! Who is Nodons? Why are you giving me something belonging to someone else?"

Just as, from the big house, came the yearning cries of Major Picthorne's dogs.

Her heart shuddered and nearly stopped, but Black Billy's lips drew back a little and he cocked his head on one side, listening.

The telephone rang from the hall, just as she knew it would, and the constraint in Major Picthorne's voice frightened her more than any anger.

"Do you not remember what we said, dear? About Black Billy?" He seemed to be talking through clenched teeth. "About not having him in the house? We don't want to upset your mother, do we? You just send him away—right now. At once, dear. We don't want things to go wrong for your mother, do we?"

Her mouthed "No" slithered down the line, but it was already dead. She picked her way unsteadily amongst the packing cases back to the kitchen, but Black Billy was gone. Only the little dog, crouched on the table top, watched her with its blank clay eyes.

Nodons' dog. That's what he'd said. But who was Nodons, then? And why, if it belonged to him, would he help her if—if things got bad?

But things weren't going to be bad! Of course they weren't! She

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was going to be Mrs. Arthur Picthorne and live in a nice house and, most of all, her mother would never have to go into a Home. *Ever.*

There was to be no question of sexual intimacy. The morning after the wedding, Helen Picthorne awoke in the little, north-facing bedroom at the top of her ugly new home and let out a breath she seemed to have held all night. She had not been sure, even though he had not even kissed her after the short ceremony, had not once let his hand touch hers throughout the day. He'd kissed Mrs. Bradshaw, though, on her high-colored cheek, and pinned a carnation to her lapel and stroked her crumpled hand and wheeled her over the threshold, almost, her daughter had thought fleetingly, as if she were the bride herself.

Mrs. Bradshaw was well pleased with her new home. Her ground-floor room was large and light, and the sliding glass doors opened conveniently onto a patio from which the lawn cascaded over two banks to the shallow chalk stream beyond. The garden, Helen had thought at first sight, was the only good thing about the ugly, isolated, and inconvenient property. Major Picthorne's decision to buy it had appalled her. Ignorant of her own future and that it was these very qualities that had determined his purchase, she'd compared it smugly to her own compact, warm, bright bungalow.

A bungalow whose sale price Mrs. Bradshaw had presented to Major Picthorne, down to the last penny. Less the mortgage, of course.

"It's your *dowry*, dear. You can't go to him empty-handed, now, can you? And he has *me* to care for, too!"

It was quite reasonable, really, yet Helen hadn't been able to rid herself of the humiliation that somehow she had been sold. Which indeed she had.

And as the months passed, Major Picthorne was well pleased with his purchase. It had taken many years but it was well worth the long planning. Hadn't he, after all, a cook, housekeeper, gardener, cleaner, kennel maid, and companion—with a built-in guarantee? For at the minutest sign of inefficiency, laxness of duty, or incompetence, he would bring up the subject of a Home—not crudely, of course, but with the perfected subtlety of the skilled inquisitor. A word here, a brochure left there, a telephone inquiry she was made aware of. And the frisson of delight, of power, that shivered through him at his wife's obvious distress drew his pink lips back in a grimace of pleasure. It was a pity, he thought sometimes, that he was not

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a sexual man, his fingers tangling in Clara's silky soft coat, his hand stroking hard the fine lines of her yielding body.

Sometimes, perhaps when he had sent his wife on foot to the village shop a mile away twice in a morning, he would say at lunch, quite concerned, dabbing his lips with the hand-washed white napkin, "Helen's looking tired, don't you think, Mrs. B.? Perhaps there's too much for her to do here—with the *three* of us, that is."

So that Mrs. Bradshaw would cry, terror sharp: "Oh, *no!* Helen's quite all right—aren't you, dear? She's terribly strong, Arthur. And I've never seen her so happy—ever! You're not tired, are you, dear?"

And Helen, too exhausted, too defeated even to form her reply, could only shake her head.

You put her in a Home—afore tis too late. That's what Black Billy had told her. *Her'll be the death of you, the old woman will.*

It seemed at those moments that he might well be right.

Later, too weary to hate him even, she'd take out the locked tin box from the back of her wardrobe and, opening it, hold each object in shaking fingers, the tears streaming unheeded down her cheeks, as if the feel of them could transport her back to happier, freer times. Her father's watch, the little pearl cross from her mother on her Confirmation, the pictures of Lynmouth and that last family holiday before her father's heart attack, the crumpled dried remains of the rose Tony Brady had given her that long ago New Year's Eve before he'd left for Liverpool and Another Girl. And Black Billy's dog. Nodons' dog. Watching her with those blank clay eyes.

She would let it rest in the palm of her hand. *When things get bad*—that's what Black Billy had said. But she hadn't believed him. *You ask Nodons—Nodons'll help!* How could this Nodons help—whoever he was? Could he free her? Could he cure her mother? Because if her mother were well, they could leave. It wouldn't matter that they had no money, they'd manage somehow—the incubus of the Home would be banished forever. Just so long as she was well again.

Unconsciously, her fingers would close about the figurine in the urgency of her hopeless prayer: Oh God, please, please make my mother well! Please, God—please make her better!

But somewhere between earth and heaven her prayer was lost. Or it could have been that she was praying to the wrong god.

Once a month, she took the bus into Trowbridge and brought back the shopping she could not obtain from the local store. She made

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her list and Major Picthorne gave her just enough money to cover the cost. He would pick her up from the village bus-stop in the car, and whenever it was raining he would be late.

It was during one of these visits that she went, on impulse, into the county library, because it seemed the only thing to do.

"Nodons?" the librarian said, unsure. "*No*dons? Now what section would that come under, dear? Don't you know?" But at the sight of Helen Picthorne's despairing eyes, she urged her to a table and eventually brought a small assortment of books and a cup of tea.

"There, dear, you drink that up. You look all in." It had been a long time, Helen thought with trembling, grateful lips, since anyone had spoken so kindly to her.

A god! Nodons was a *god!*

Shock loosened her grip on the book and the librarian, discreetly watching, thought apprehensively, Oh dear, oh dear, she wasn't going to be one of *those,* was she?

A god—a Celtic pagan god with a temple at Lydney and a reputation for healing. Representations of dogs had been found there—her hands began to tremble then, so she had to lay the book flat on the table—for dogs, so it seemed, had strong connections with healing, being offered in wells and streams and rivers to invoke help in several pagan cults.

'Tis Nodons' dog. You give 'n to Nodons—Nodons'll help—you ask Nodons.

She shut the books quickly, her heart hammering. It was magic! Black magic! She wanted none of that. Black magic was dangerous! You shouldn't meddle with black magic—*ever!* And, gathering up her shopping, she stumbled from the library with a haste that set the librarian sighing in disapproval.

But that night, the little clay dog resting in the palm of her hand, the doubts crept out of the shadows, tempting her. After all, Jesus had raised Lazarus, hadn't He? Ah, but that was blasphemy! Yet what harm could there possibly be? There wasn't a well, but they did have the river. —She only wanted her mother to get better, that was all. It wasn't a curse—it was a prayer, a *good* prayer. There couldn't be anything wrong in that, surely?

A door banged. In panic, she pushed the box to the back of the cupboard, and as she hurried to switch off her light she glimpsed her face in the mirror, the pretty gilt mirror she'd brought from the bungalow. It was the face of an old woman, and its reflected despair determined her decision . . .

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On the second Thursday of each month, Major Picthorne drove his mother-in-law into Trowbridge to have her hair done. They would lunch at The Crown Hotel and then he would wheel her to the shops.

"He's an angel—he's so good to me—he takes such care of me," she'd effuse to anyone who'd listen, and Major Picthorne would smirk inwardly, for he was, after all, only protecting his security. He would disguise his impatience beneath the military brusqueness Mrs. Bradshaw found so appealing. He did not care to be away from the dogs too long.

The dogs did not care for it, either. Refusing to move from the living room, they'd wait, taut with expectation, their disdain for their master's wife coldly apparent, until the sound of the car released them from their vigil.

So there was no one to see Helen hurry down to the river that early summer morning, no one to hear her murmured words or to watch as she knelt and gently, with both hands, proffered the little figurine. It turned twice in the shallow, lazy water before settling onto the white chalk bed between the dark rafts of starwort.

She closed her eyes tightly, her fists balled hard together. "Please—please make my mother well! God Nodons, hear my prayer—make my mother well!"

She was in the lower rose bed when she heard the car return that afternoon. Normally she would hurry to meet it, but today she stood unmoving, the trowel drooping from her hand.

Her mother would come to *her* today! That's what would happen today!

Instead, it was Major Picthorne who rushed from the house.

"Clara—where's Clara?" His voice was a near scream. *"What have you done with Clara?"*

The setters swirled about him, ecstatic, oblivious in their stupidity to his distress, as the trowel fell from Helen's grasp, bruising her ankle bone with a pain she did not feel. Clara was with the other dogs, of course she was, she'd seen her there in the living room not an hour ago. On the sofa. Waiting behind the firmly closed door.

Something then, some awful premonition, a knowledge she did not yet know, made her turn toward the river, propelled her those few yards across the turf to the bank as firmly as a hand in the small of her back.

Clara lay there, the long strands of her coat streaming out in the gentle current like the starwort about her, her legs tucked beneath

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her, her head turned so that she stared up with blank black eyes. Just as Nodons' dog had lain.

She heard her husband's howl as she reached the house, but she did not stop. She dragged the box from her wardrobe, snatching open the lid.

Nodons' dog crouched there. Watching her, as if it had expected her. But now the clay was darker, discolored. She touched it. It was quite damp—sodden, in fact. Just as if it had been under water.

She slammed shut the lid as her mother screamed her name.

In the brown-tiled hall, Mrs. Bradshaw, arms outstretched to retain her balance, tottered like a fledgling bird, her face slack and white with outraged shock.

"Helen! *Helen! I can walk!* Look—"

But her daughter was staring past her.

Major Picthorne came slowly through the doorway, Clara's body draped like sodden velvet across his rod-stiff arms, his mouth grimaced open as if that last cry had petrified those pink lips.

It was a mask, but not of grief. Terror immobilized her, hypnotized her as a rabbit is hypnotized. He came to the foot of the stairs and began slowly to climb toward her while the water from Clara's coat, from his shoes and trousers, stained the floor behind him.

Beyond, she could see her mother's figure, swaying like some mystic dancer about the cavernous hallway, her freshly set grey hair disheveled on her forehead, heard her high, ecstatic chant: "I can walk—I'm cured—I can walk!"

Mother! Mother—save me! screamed Helen soundlessly.

And in that second of pure, mesmerized terror before she lunged blindly for escape, before her feet were taken from under her, Helen heard another voice, mocking, taunting—Black Billy's voice:

"Her'll be the death of you, the old woman will."

"It was the dog—it was Clara, you see—" Major Picthorne tried hard to disguise the tears, as befitted a military man, and the police sergeant coughed and averted his head discreetly. "She was so upset. She loved Clara—she loved those dogs—she blamed herself. She tripped—it was so quick, she didn't have a chance." He choked a little and cleared his throat and blew his nose loudly on his freshly laundered handkerchief. "That's right, Mrs. B., isn't it? She didn't have a chance."

But Mrs. Bradshaw did not answer. She was much too busy touching her toes and giving silent, fervent thanks for a miracle she didn't

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understand, so that the police sergeant thought contemptuously: Stupid old fool! Her daughter not an hour dead and all she can do is bloody gymnastics! Stupid old bat!

But he should have known, as Mrs. Bradshaw knew, that there were times in life when it was much the wisest to play the fool. And remembering the expression on Arthur Picthorne's face when he had carried in that poor dead dog, it seemed to her that this was one of them.

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a *NEW* Sam Train story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

"We're down to one biased witness—you—and some circumstantial evidence," Sam said. "Just how important is this to you?"

Arlene Reynolds frowned, as at an unfair adversarial question. "At this point," she said coldly, "there's nothing more important . . ."

THE REYNOLDS AFFAIR

by ERNEST SAVAGE

"I was told," she said, "that I would probably find you in the booth under the picture of Errol Flynn." She waited for me to look up at her, and then said, "May I sit down?" I'd never seen her before.

I had a mouthful of Sheldon's Irish stew and Boudin's heavily buttered sourdough bread. I also had an open book on the table and pointedly didn't close it as I nodded a glum welcome.

She sat, gracefully for a woman her height. "Is it true," she said, "that Errol Flynn actually ate in this particular booth—or is that apocryphal?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. Sheldon claims that all the pictures on his walls are of people who ate here—but he's Irish. I sit in this particular booth because I like the view I get of the front door."

"Are you an eccentric, Mr. Train?" Her voice was throaty, but the words were clear. She had large grey eyes (later, corrected, I would say "greyish") in a handsome, square-cut, no-nonsense face. If I had a sister, I thought at that moment, she would look like her. I'd always wanted a sister, a *younger* sister, who would be about forty now, roughly this woman's age.

She cut her hair Prince Valiant style, but didn't know—or maybe care—that the stiff Bay breeze outside had blown it into disarray.

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I liked that. She was a serious woman, and more welcome now. The grey-tweed jacket she wore over a lavender boat-neck blouse looked off-the-rack, a little ill-fitting. Or perhaps she'd lost weight—there was a certain gauntness in the handsome face. I closed the book and answered her question. "No, I don't think so."

"You have no office, Mr. Train. You have no phone, and apparently you don't respond to your answering-service calls."

"I'm not fond of offices or phones," I said. "Or paperwork. Maybe I *am* eccentric. But who told you about me and Errol Flynn, and what can I do for you?"

She didn't answer at once. I was being evaluated, she was making judgments—a sisterly prerogative. I would bend, I decided. I would do whatever she wanted me to do. You protect your sister. We now had rapport—or I did. I drank some red wine and smiled.

"My name is Arlene Reynolds," she said, "and my life is being threatened."

She was still a little tentative, but I had passed muster. Arlene, huh? Close enough. "Threatened by whom?"

"By several people, but all because of a young man named Harold Nelson." She fumbled into her large canvas shoulder bag, a lumpy presence beside her on the seat, got out a cigarette, and lit it.

No sister of mine should sm— I said, "What about Mr. Nelson?"

"Nine weeks ago last Monday afternoon, he shot me." She drew aside the neck of the blouse with a long-fingered hand and revealed a bullet entry-wound on the upper slope of her left breast. I had seen a number of such wounds and so I didn't wince, but it was ugly. It could be cosmetically repaired, made largely to disappear, but I sensed she wouldn't go to the trouble, that she took life's blows as they came and moved steadfastly on. She wore no makeup, I noted then, and no jewelry, no finger rings.

"Tell me about it," I said.

She owned and ran a bookstore called the Paperback Trading Mart on a street intersecting Columbus Avenue near Washington Square in North Beach. She'd made a decent living there for nine trouble-free years until Nelson entered her store that afternoon, pointed a gun at her, and demanded money. No prior experience had prepared her for that moment and it seemed totally unreasonable to her. She said no, of course she wouldn't give him money, and he extended the gun and pulled the trigger, giving her just enough time to duck and take the bullet where she did instead of through the heart.

I was a cop for nineteen years on the San Francisco force. We used

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to tell people to never quarrel with a gun, to treat it as the god of the moment any moment one appeared. But apparently she had different gods—including righteous indignation.

A clerk in a dry-cleaning shop across the street had seen Nelson enter the book mart, gun in hand, and had called the police even as the shot was fired. Nelson had brushed aside a Chinese woman as he rushed out the door and ran up the street toward Stockton. He was picked up by the police twenty minutes later near Ghirardelli Square.

"And the Chinese woman called the ambulance for you?" I said.

"No. I called the ambulance. But she identified Nelson in the lineup the next morning— as I did myself."

"You? The next morning?"

She brushed a strand of her hair—pewter-colored, I decided—more or less back into place. "Yes. My apartment is directly over the store. I was home by eleven-thirty that night."

I should have known. "The gun?" I said.

"He had thrown it away. It was never found—there are a million places it could be. But tests of his hand proved he'd fired a gun, and traces of gun-oil were found on his pants and his shirt."

"What color shirt, Miss Reynolds?"

"Solid blue—worker-blue."

She was a wonder, and also a "Miss." "Nelson," I said. "A Nordic name. What color were his eyes? Also blue, I suppose?"

"Eyes are never just one color, Mr. Train." I was being admonished. "They are dots and streaks and glints of several colors. Greyish, greenish, brownish, or blueish. His were blueish. They were drug-maddened and drug-hungry."

"What color are yours?" I said, closing mine.

"Greyish."

"And mine?"

"Also greyish, Mr. Train. Even though you're not pointing a gun at me, which wonderfully concentrates the attention, I would attest that they are greyish. You may open them now, if you please."

I did, smiling again, overjoyed with her. "Would you like some wine?" I asked.

She would.

She was at home in her store the way Henry the VIII was at home in Hampton Court, or an eagle in its nest. She glowed with the protective pride of ownership. I could picture her behind the counter

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near the door, indignantly refusing Nelson's demand. I could picture her not quite falling to the floor when shot, rising pragmatically to reach for the phone and dial 911. Then perhaps pressing a hand against the wound to staunch the flow of blood as she waited. Some sister I'd given myself.

She'd had two glasses of wine at Sheldon's, sketching out her story. Nelson, with some circumstantial evidence and firmly identified in the lineup, had been charged with attempted murder. He'd spent Monday and Tuesday nights in jail and been released on twenty thousand dollars' bail Wednesday morning. He'd pleaded innocent. His lawyer was Mark Ballew.

My brows lifted.

"You know him?"

"By reputation," I said. "Expensive, a tiger in the courtroom. He doesn't often lose. Who's paying the tab?"

"Nelson's family," Arlene said. "They live on Bay Street—I believe they have money."

It didn't impress her—what had money to do with justice? Could you *buy* justice? Did the price of your lawyer decide? I would have to educate her. But I said, "You told me Nelson is threatening your life. How? What's he doing?"

"He's having people phone me—and phone May Chong."

"The Chinese lady?"

"Yes. She told me yesterday she won't testify against him. She has two young children—he's threatened to kill them both. She was in tears—she's terrified."

I said, "Tell me about the calls to you."

"There've been nine so far," she answered, "over the past seven days. My best guess is three people—one of them, the most frightening one, a woman—made all the calls. With obvious attempts to disguise their voices."

"A woman—are you sure?"

"Yes. A mature woman, possibly elderly—I got that impression. She made awful threats, *vicious* threats."

"When's the trial?" I said.

"Next Monday morning at ten."

"Less than three days. And we're down to one biased witness—you—and some circumstantial evidence. With Mark Ballew to beat. Just how important is this to you?"

She frowned, as at an unfair adversarial question. "At this point," she said coldly, "there's nothing more important."

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"You want vengeance?"

"Vengeance?" The frown deepened. "I want justice, Mr. Train. I want that young man taken off the streets and punished. Is that so hard to understand?"

"No," I said soothingly. "But it might be hard to achieve."

The Paperback Trading Mart was narrow and deep, well lit and clean. She said she had more than twenty-five thousand volumes on the shelves, separated as to genre: westerns, romance, suspense, etc. As I've said, she glowed here.

She'd closed the store for the day. On the counter, which extended ten feet into the room from the door, there was a display of ceramic flowers, four vases of them, each a different color and style. I bent down to mock-sniff at one and she said,

"Beautifully done, aren't they? I like them because they make no pretense of not being artificial." She smiled. "Also you can wash them, just dip them in dishwater."

"You sell them?"

"Yes." She ceased smiling. She'd saved something to tell me now. "Yesterday a man came in and took one from each vase and broke them, crushed them on the counter. I was there." She pointed. "He just looked at me and then walked out."

I felt a hot rush of rage. "That's when you decided to hire protection, isn't it?"

"Yes." She frowned. "The phone calls didn't bother me half as much. He just looked at me, Sam."

I wanted to touch her, maybe even take her in my arms. "Describe him," I said, restraining myself.

"He was tall—almost as tall as you." She'd lit another cigarette and held it in the air to indicate height. "He wore a wool seaman's hat, a blue-denim jacket over a red-and-green-plaid shirt, worn and soiled bluejeans. He was dark-complected."

I took her by the shoulders. "I've got a cabin in the Sierra, near Mountain City," I said sternly. "I'm gonna take you there."

"Run, you mean."

"Don't screw around with words, Arlene—save your hide is what I mean. They're out to kill you if nothing else works. An assassin may be next. I can't stand by your door for three days and nights with a gun in my hand."

She pulled away from my grip and said, "No, I won't run, it would be wrong. You're angry—you can't make proper decisions when you're angry."

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"Nor when you're scared," I growled, "and you're scared. You're shaking." I caught her shoulders again. "Look, I'll come back and run the store tomorrow. Just tell me how to do it. I'll take you up there this afternoon, come back here, and open in the morning."

Fear—that great modifier of plans and debaser of the will. I let it work in her, watched it grow in her eyes, encouraged it. Then I softened my stony face and drew her close enough to kiss between her brows. She folded her arms to keep my chest from touching hers, but allowed me to draw her closer still.

I breathed, "Okay?"

Her eyes were closed, she seemed half asleep. She grew pliant in my arms, as if she was unused to the protective fold, unused to love. How could that be?

"Okay," she said finally.

I checked the butane tank, turned on the refrigerator and the heat, and lit a table lamp. She went immediately to my wall of books and studied it while I made up the bed. We'd been nearly silent coming up in the Dart, two and a half hours of a growing tension I finally understood.

"Relax," I said. "Not far from here a guy named Chris Wilde owns a cabin I've got a key to. He's old and doesn't come up much any more, so I keep an eye on the place. Saturday and Sunday nights I'll stay there." I looked at her unturned back. "You listening?"

"I heard you," she said. She took a book from the shelf and opened it.

"You've probably read it," I said. "It's all old stuff."

"So? Some books are meant to be reread, and most of these are."

"Right, and not a bad place to do it, the mountains. Give your arthritic old values a walk through the woods."

I'd bought a few bags of groceries in Mountain City and busied myself stocking the fridge and shelves, then made a pair of drinks without asking her. A battle of the sexes was under way. I found myself wondering if she had an exit wound on her back, and if I would ever see it.

"I should write you a check, shouldn't I?" she said finally, and turned away from the books.

"If you want." We hadn't discussed my fee. "Or I'll just keep tomorrow's receipts. Saturdays are probably big days, huh?"

"Are you really going to open the store tomorrow?"

"That's the plan, isn't it? You gave me the key, didn't you? You

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didn't want to cut and run, so we're not. This way we keep the flag up the pole. Can't scare us—so what if they firebomb the place?"

She'd gone up to her apartment and packed a small overnight bag. I had the feeling it contained most of what she owned, that she was indifferent to clothes. I wondered if she slept naked, a gaggle of unbrotherly thoughts loose in my head. Now *I* wanted to cut and run, get away from her.

"I've never stayed overnight in the mountains," she said, a greenhorn's awe in her voice.

"They're nice, Arlene, they're big. They've been here a long time. They're safe."

"Are they?"

Asked by a nervous city girl conditioned to the sound of the streets. I'd left the front door open to air the place out, the screen door hooked. The forest silence that soothes my city soul could as well alarm her city ears. Put yourself in the other person's shoes, my mother always told me. The Dart was parked a quarter mile away at the end of a twisting gravel road out from town. I'd walked her over a spongy forest path through giant, fearsome trees, twilight already descending—a dangerously shadowed gloom, as she probably saw it.

"You'll be all right," I said firmly. "Drink your drink."

"You have no phone here." She'd just noticed, her eyes darting at all the corners.

"One of its many charms, ma'am."

She took a brave stance a foot from the also dangerous bed, a disingenuous smile plastered on her face. "Well, anyway," she said, "will you stay for supper?"

"No, I don't think so. I might be tempted to stay the night." I paused for an unsubtle moment before adding, "Not here, of course, but over at Wilde's place."

"It's not *really* necessary to keep the store open—"

"I think it is, Arlene. Show the colors, as I said, and maybe I can nail the thug who broke your flowers. I've got to find one of them to talk to. I've got to find out how tough they are." I paused again, feet glued to the floor. I unglued them. "I'll go now," I said. "Have a good read, play yourself some music."

It was very, very hard to go out that door—which she promptly locked behind me.

The phone rang two minutes after I got home and I snatched the

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receiver off the kitchen wall and spoke a breathless hello. Only three people know my unlisted number, and the voice I heard wasn't owned by any of them.

"Train," it said bluntly, "where the hell've you been?"

"Down the coast," I answered without a pause. "Who wants to know?"

"Down the coast with the broad, or what? Get outa this game, Sam."

He knew who I was: advantage his. But I heard traffic noises in my ear—he was using a streetside booth or a car phone. "What broad?" I said. "What game?"

"Come on, man, we saw her go into Sheldon's for lunch and come out with you—like she won the door-prize. Then you went to that crumby bookstore of hers. Then we lost you. Where the hell is she?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"We want to talk to her, that's all."

"You been talking to her all week—you and two other people. You know what she's got to say."

"Yeah, but she hasn't heard our latest offer."

"Her life, huh? Look, gimme a name or I hang up."

"You don't need a name."

"Goodbye—whoever you are."

"All right—call me Johnny."

"Yeah, I've heard of you. Johnny the Hit Man. Johnny Smith."

"Nobody needs to get hit, Train. But you might keep the thought in mind."

"What's the alternative, Mr. Smith?"

"What's her price?"

"She's a pearl without one, Johnny. But listen, for God's sake, who's this Nelson kid that he rates your kind of heat? Is this some kind of a Mafia gig or what?"

"No, and Nelson's not the name to bear in mind, Sambo. Try Newhall—the Elliot Newhall family. Nelson's just the delinquent grandson, the bad seed. Grandma don't want the family name besmirched—and what Grandma wants, Grandma gets. If she wanted the Mafia, she'd get the Mafia, believe me."

"Just one good gun is enough, huh? Grandma wants no trial—a dismissal on accounta everybody got lockjaw, suddenly taken dead, or disappeared."

"Same difference, Train. Use your head, man."

"Hang on a minute," I said.

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I stood with the phone at my side and bit back a rising surge of rage. Use your head, he said, and that was good advice. He'd been waiting for me out there, long since knowing who I was, possibly knowing all about me now. All of which meant what? That I go right back up the hill, among other things. I was fencing with a killer.

I raised the phone and said, "Okay, Johnny, how about this? Five grand for her and two for me."

He was quick. "You keep her down the coast for a week, Train, or wherever the hell she is, and you've got yourself a deal." He chuckled. "Plus this bonus."

"What bonus?"

"She won't have to hold a fire sale at that store of hers."

"You mean her estate won't—"

"Yeah, Train, that's what I mean."

"I like the money deal better," I said, and we began to make elaborate plans for me to pick up the cash at ten in the morning at the main branch of the B of A. He would recognize me at once, he said, adding a touch of verisimilitude to what we both knew was a pure fiction. "See you then," I said finally, and left the apartment five minutes later, betting he would see me leave and follow.

The moon was full, but only a little of its silvery light filtered through to the forest floor. It was 12:30 A.M. when I parked at the end of the road, making no attempt to hide the car among the trees. I stepped out of it into that dark primeval silence that chills the base of the spine and gives pause to even a veteran's feet. But long ago I made a pact with the local fauna—mountain lions, mostly: the path and the cabin are mine, the rest of the place yours, the pure tangy air we share—and I drew deeply of it as I threaded through the trees, wishing my sister Arlene didn't smoke. I'd picked up two bottles of burgundy on the way through town. I'll take good clean lungs to the grave, a liver like a sieve.

She answered the door wrapped in a Navajo blanket, clutched tightly at her throat. "What's wrong?" she said.

"How'd you like a quick five grand," I said, "to stay here for a week?"

She let me in, closed the door, and shot the bolt. A Schubert tape was playing softly on my battery-operated stereo—she hadn't even tried to sleep. "I wouldn't," she said, looking like a haughty Indian queen.

"Then okay, Miss Reynolds, that's that."

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"Sam, what happened? Who'd you talk to?"

"Get dressed," I said, "or at least put your shoes on. You're gonna sleep at Wilde's tonight—probably tomorrow and Sunday, too."

Wilde's place had a phone, soothing her nerves a little, putting her at least in touch now with the world she knew. She was in his big double bed, covered once again to the chin. I drew up a chair and told her about our man Smith. "He's probably running the show for Ballew and the old lady," I said, "the one whose calls scared you the most. The third or fourth Mrs. Elliot Newhall. She's real, Arlene, a real-life Falcon Crest bitch, arrogant with pioneer blood and money, corrupt with pride and power, probably insane with it all."

She had listened, stony-faced. "What will happen," she said, "when you don't show up at the bank this morning?"

"He won't show up, either. We shared a fiction. Nothing will happen."

"God! Your world!" she said. "Were you followed here tonight?" She answered her own question. "You were, weren't you? That was the idea, wasn't it, to draw him up here?"

I shrugged.

"With me as bait! Me as the tethered goat!"

"And me as the goatsherd," I said. "Or whatever he's called. The fellow with the crook in hand—so to speak."

"He's called *Pan,* with the horns and ears of a goat himself! I *hate* your world, so full of lies!"

"Well, I'm not too fond of it myself, lady, but it's your world, too. You're one hundred percent good, let's all agree about that, but you're the only one in town who is. Get off your goddamn high-horse, Arlene, I'm doing what I have to do."

"I would like to go home," she said, clamping her eyes shut. "If I've got to die, I'd rather it be in my own bed. I hate your spooky woods, too."

"You're not gonna die—and you're gonna stay where you are. Open your eyes, please, I'm talking to you." She did, and I said seriously, "Look, Smith picked up my unlisted number in no time at all. He's got resources—*they* do—that the Chief of Police doesn't have. They probably know all about me by now, including the coordinates of this cabin. Try to get the picture. If I can lure him up here, I can intercept him up here— in *my* country, not his. Down there we'd be his pigeons. Up here, he's ours—or mine, anyway,

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since you'll be tending the kitchen." I put on my most winning smile. "You cook, don't you?"

"I cook very well."

"Well, then, get some sleep. I'm gonna want an early breakfast."

I had a twenty-foot length of chain and two padlocks, one from Wilde's place and one from mine. I was wearing a deerskin jacket, fringed and beaded in Indian style, a gift from a long-ago girl friend. I had moccasins on my feet and a yellow sweatband around my head. I carried a .22 rifle and wore the .38 Walther I've owned for twenty-five years in the belt of my faded bluejeans. The short trip from my place to Wilde's I'd made as carefully as a platoon point-man, but I'd seen nothing.

I said to Arlene, who'd looked at me and blinked as though blinded, "I've got two options—one, I shoot him on the spot, or, two, I chain him to a tree."

"If I know you," she said, "you'll shoot him."

"No. If I shot him, you'd have to bury him, and I can't find a shovel."

It was nine o'clock Saturday morning, and she'd mastered Wilde's compact kitchen, a stack of buckwheat pancakes already growing alongside the cook-top, the smell of coffee in the air. She was wearing jeans, a blouse, and an apron. Her hair was combed out and looked neat.

"Well, anyway," I said, feeling proud of her, "good morning."

"If I wrote you a check right now," she said, "would you take me home—or is there a costume party tonight you haven't told me about?"

"It's a very workmanlike outfit," I huffed. "No, I'll take you directly to the courthouse Monday morning. Until then you stay here, doing what you're doing."

"Sam, what will you *really* do to him? Surely you have a third option, don't you?"

"You see violence ahead," I said, "and you don't like it. Well, neither do I—believe it or not." I sat down and drank some juice. "He probably took a motel room in Mountain City last night," I went on, "and right now he's making plans. He's a hit man, and hit men make plans."

I had her attention. "Is he alone, do you think?"

"Probably—it's not committee work, Arlene. Also, I think he's on

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the spot. He's got Ballew to deal with, and that fierce old lady, so he'll want to get it right."

"Killing me," she said, "*murdering* me, seems—" She shook her head.

"Excessive—yeah, I know. But it's the only sure way there is, isn't it? Monday, assuming you're not there, the D.A. would probably ask for a postponement. Then you show up a week later and—"

"Yes," she said. She understood that. I watched her with great care and said,

"He probably thinks we're curled up together in that sack of mine over there, oblivious to it all."

"Some imagination."

"Yeah, but that's the way these low-lifes are."

"I meant yours, Mr. Train."

"Oh. Sure, well, my world, too, as you said. The thing is, you've got to get in the other guy's head, work along with him."

"Which is no trouble for you, is it?" The small diversion had changed her mood, and she nearly slammed a plate of pancakes onto the table. "Eat if you can," she said, "and kindly shut up."

"Really what you meant, ma'am, is vice versa." I picked up my fork.

Her handsome face across the table from mine was now impassive, almost stoic. The clear morning light, made soft by the trees, was radiant, without shadow. I busied myself with the pancakes—and the problem.

"What he'll do," I said, "is drive out from town and park at the end of the road. He'll see the Dart and know we're here. Then he'll follow the signs to my place and lay in wait until—"

"What signs?"

"You didn't notice? Wood signs nailed to the trees to guide strangers. That road serves about a dozen cabins scattered all around here. He'll follow the Train signs to mine, and I'll follow him. —No, I think I'll just wait for him—at the cabin."

"And then what—some sort of a Wild West shootout?"

"I know," I said, "you don't like that idea. You've been shot, you know what it's like. And so do I."

She was silent a while and then, "I'm sorry," she said. "It's not really your world, is it? It's the world you fight." She pushed her plate aside. "One of the many things I can't fake is hunger, Sam, and there's no sense in our playing house like this. You're going to do violence in my name, that's all I can think about."

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"I'm going to do only what I have to do."

"I don't want to know about it," she said.

He would come, I thought, at twilight. He would locate the cabin, then take up a position somewhere with a view of its front door. He'd see light through the chinks of carefully arranged curtains and see smoke from the chimney. Then along about nine-thirty, he'd see the light go out. He'd wait maybe an hour, maybe longer, and then he'd make his move. He'd find the screen door hooked, just to make him think it wasn't a setup, but the stout wood door would be ajar—to allow for night ventilation, he would tell himself. He'd walk silently to the bed against the far side of the room, guided by the pale glow of the banked fire, then he would shoot the two people he found sleeping there. Then he would get hit on the head with a poker and fall to the floor.

It went almost exactly that way, except that he waited only a half hour after the lights went out. Maybe he got cramped or a little chilly waiting in the woods. Or maybe he just said to himself, Hell, let's get her done. Hit men have few real problems: the trick is to not be seen doing the job, and then calmly walk or drive away. And who would be there to see him?

I'd hit him a pretty good wallop on his hatless and almost hairless head and I had my chain and padlocks ready. I looped one end of the chain around his neck and locked it there tightly, the links pressing into his tallowy flesh. He was a heavy man. Then I dragged his still-limp body into the john, threw the other end of the chain out the window, went out the back door, and locked that end around a still-young ponderosa, eighteen inches thick at the base. I took my time going back, fired one of the Coleman lamps, and was pleased to see him fumbling at the iron presence around his neck.

"Johnny," I said, "welcome to the high country."

Arlene let me in Wilde's blacked-out cabin at ten-thirty. She had a flashlight in one hand, a book in the other. She was fully dressed.

"It's all right," I said too tersely, still post-adrenal. "You can relax, Smitty's in hand."

She said nothing as I fired a lamp and went around drawing back drapes from the windows: doing things.

Finally she said, "Is he hurt?"

"He's got a headache," I snapped, "but he'll live."

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"Then I suppose," she said, also snappish, "you could remove that ridiculous headband of yours, couldn't you?"

"It's a sweatband, ma'am—a big difference. I was working and waiting, and when I work and wait I sweat." But I took it off—damp, despite the chill mountain air—and dropped it on the kitchen counter. "Incidentally," I said, "he put a bullet through your head, represented by the business end of my mop."

She put the book on the table. It was Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, and seemed appropriate to me—a tough and lawless century, the Fourteenth, a tough and lawless century ours, mirror images in their way. "Sam, were *you* hurt?" She looked me over briefly for signs.

"No—thanks for asking. But I *am* hungry." I poured a large glass of wine. I hadn't eaten since breakfast—I'd been half a day setting things up and waiting. But she'd been waiting, too, hadn't she? "I'm sorry," I said, "I'm a bit touchy. But he's all right and so am I. He's on the floor of the john at my place, and more comfortable than he deserves to be. I left him plenty to eat and drink, including a nearly full quart of vodka. He'll probably pass out before long."

"But couldn't he get away?"

"No. Well, yes, he could, or at least out of the cabin, but I don't think he'll want to."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, okay," I said, "what he is is tethered." I explained, and she smiled a little, seeing a symmetry in the thing, the word no longer offensive.

"Now what?" she said. "Are you going to leave him there?"

"No. Tomorrow afternoon I'll turn him over to this deputy sheriff I know up here—a fellow named Arkins, whose life, he thinks, I saved once."

"Did you? I mean, you do now and again, don't you? Like mine."

"Sometimes," I said. "I can't help it."

I moved out of the tiny kitchen as she moved in. She could have brushed by me, made contact, but she didn't. I sat at the table with my wine.

"What Arkins'll do," I said, "is lock him up for a couple of days—say through Tuesday."

"On what charge?"

"I don't know—drunk while chained to a National Forest tree, it doesn't matter, Arlene, not up here. They recognize bad guys when they see them. They don't subscribe to all the niceties of the law the

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way we do down below, where we're so civilized. Plus also," I said, "they might charge him with attempted murder—which raises a problem. His gun's on the floor where he dropped it. I didn't touch it, or the mop with the gunshot wound. I mean, the whole place should now be considered a crime scene—off limits, locked up even."

"What you're saying is that you can't sleep there tonight."

"Well, gosh, it'd be against the law, ma'am—I could get in trouble."

"But not here at Wilde's, you think. I mean not get in trouble." She was busy opening cans, not looking at me, not engaging my eyes. I still heard the thunk of the poker against Smith's head and hungered for other sights and sounds.

But rule one in P.I. work is Never Sleep with a Client, or even give the appearance of Sleeping with a Client. A defensive move on her part right then would be to write me a check, and I wished she would. A defensive move on mine would be to eat, drink, and run. Or just run. But I poured more wine, emptying the bottle. You're tired, I told myself, and hungry for food. And she's an Ambiguity—while you're, maybe, an Eccentric.

She lit one of her cigarettes and watched a pot of beans grow warm on the stove. She was hip-shot and shoulder-slumped, a relaxed and beguiling figure. She had my skin tones, eyes and nose, and the hair color I'm steadily working on. My sister. And rule two—everybody's—is that You Don't.

She turned to me and began to talk. "Sam, you could—"

"Yeah, I know," I said. "I could take a sleeping bag over there and camp on the floor. I should've thought of that before, but I'm slow tonight. How about them beans, Sis?"

"They're almost warm enough," she said, and stared at me with knowing eyes.

Arkins took Smith away at four-thirty Sunday afternoon. Arkins is half Indian—the best half, he says—and he listened, flat-faced, while I told him the whole story, his eyes occasionally drifting over to study Arlene, alluring in another boat-necked blouse.

"How long you think the trial'll run?" he said.

"Probably two days, Ark."

"Then I'll let him go Wednesday sometime—unless you tell me different." Now he looked at Smith, handcuffed, hungover, and slumped in a chair. He'd eaten little, but drunk everything I'd let him have. His gun was in an evidence bag and Arkins had taken

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pictures of the bed, a halo of feathers around the blasted mop head. "Or," he said, "he could get shot tryin' to escape."

Smith raised his head and lowered it again, saying nothing. Arlene, I noticed, briefly closed her eyes—not quite tough enough yet. I smiled.

The trip back down the hill was like the trip up—not much talking. Passing through Auburn, she said, "How much will I owe you?"

"Oh, I don't know. How about I come in the store and borrow books for the rest of my life—free?"

"Trade them, you mean?" she said.

"Well, yes. I mean you give me a starter set, say three or four, then I just keep trading them for three or four more, say once a week or so. The first set'll be my fee."

"It could add up, though, couldn't it?" she said. "I mean three or four books fifty-two times a year times, say, ten or fifteen years or however long you manage to stay alive—"

"Well, if it's too dear for you, we could just—"

"No, no, Mr. Train, it's all right, really, it's all right."

"Well, gee, Miss Reynolds, thanks a lot."

Passing through Sacramento, she said, "I phoned May Chong yesterday morning from Wilde's place."

"And?"

"She's going to meet me at court. I told her what happened and she said she'd testify."

"That's great."

"She said she'd decided to even before I called—in fact, she told me she would before I told her about you."

"About me? What about me?"

"I mean what you did."

"Just my job, Miss Reynolds."

Passing through Fairfield, I said, "Look, what if I trade books with you, say, every Tuesday morning around eleven-thirty? Then we go to Sheldon's for lunch—"

"On me, you mean? As part of your fee?"

"No, no! I had me in mind—on me."

"Dutch," she said, still staring straight ahead. "And only one bottle of wine, Mr. Train."

I grinned. "Okay, Sis."

Now she looked at me and said, "This 'Sis' thing—" But then she let it go—and so did I.

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Driving over the Carquinex Straits Bridge, she said she didn't want me to attend the trial, that she'd put her bag in May Chong's car and May would drive her home later, I'd done enough.

She got out, bag in hand, and leaned back through the open window. "Is a simple thank you okay for now?"

"Quite okay," I said. I stopped and felt my face flush, realizing I wanted to ask her if she had that exit wound I'd been thinking about. It was none of my business, was it? Indelicate even to hold the thought. And maybe—in the normal course of events—I'd find out without asking. It didn't matter. I liked her, maybe even loved her, just the way she was: full of mystery.

"Quite okay," I said again. "Good luck today, Arlene."

DETECTIVERSE

BOOK MARK

by C. ROWELL

(with compliments to James Holding)

About your book long overdue—
If you indulge in crime,
Make sure with Hal you leave no clue
Or you'll be marking time.

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a *NEW* short story by

IAN STUART

Within another quarter of an hour, the wind was stronger and blowing harder every minute. Before long it was a gale, lashing the hedges and everything in its way as the clouds churned across the sky, blotting out the sun and bringing darkness before it was even dusk. Thunder muttered in the distance and lightning flashed . . .

THE NIGHT OF THE STORM

by IAN STUART

Dora gave her uncle a final anxious look and followed the doctor out of the room, closing the door behind them before she asked, "How is he, Doctor?"

Doctor Kershaw, a greying, middle-aged man, hesitated for a moment before he answered quietly, "He's as well as can be expected, Mrs. Jackson."

Dora faced him squarely, a worried frown on her round, good-natured features. "What does that mean?" she asked.

Again the doctor didn't answer immediately. He eyed her comfortable figure, wrapped as usual in a faded flower-print house dress, her clear grey eyes, and her fair hair, not yet showing any signs of grey and done in the way she had worn it for the last twenty years. A few stray hairs had worked loose and were straggling about her ears, but she was oblivious of them. She was a sensible woman, he thought. And she wasn't the old man's daughter. Moreover, she was a countrywoman and from a farming family—people like her accepted death as natural and inevitable in a way town dwellers sometimes didn't.

All the same, he was a kindly man and he weighed his words

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carefully before he said, "I'm afraid it's unlikely he'll ever be much better than he is now. It's quite possible he'll have a second stroke, and if he does—" He left the sentence unfinished. "How old is he?"

"Sixty-nine," Dora said.

"He hasn't had a particularly easy life, one way and another, has he?"

"No." Dora knew what the doctor meant. It was something people didn't mention in her hearing as a rule, but she knew, all right.

"The main thing is for him to avoid any worry and stress," Kershaw went on. "Try to see he takes things as quietly as possible."

"He worries about the farm," Dora said.

"Yes, I suppose he does." The doctor looked round the yard at the all too obvious signs of neglect. The tractor over by the barn looked as if it had stood out all last winter, and there was rust on the old plough near it. Grass was growing up round two discarded oil drums.

It was common knowledge in the district that Applegate Farm was going to rack and ruin. Davies—the manager old Frank Cain had reluctantly employed when it became obvious he could no longer run things himself—was useless or worse: local gossip had it he was robbing Cain blind. It must be hell for the old man, sitting at his window, hardly able to move, watching his life's work disintegrate before his eyes.

"He won't let me do anything," Dora remarked sadly. "He's that stubborn. And he won't have anything changed. Mr. Waters at the bank suggested he sell the twenty-acre field—there wouldn't be any trouble getting planning permission from the council for houses to be built there, he said. But Uncle Frank wouldn't hear of it. He wants everything to stay like it's always been."

Doctor Kershaw nodded sympathetically, but he was a busy man and he had other patients still to see. "Call me if there's any change," he said. "But frankly, there's very little anybody can do for him just now except see that he's comfortable and stop him worrying, if that's possible."

"Thank you, Doctor," Dora said.

She watched him pick his way across the muddy yard to his car and climb in, then she shut the door and returned to her uncle's room at the back of the house.

The old man was reading *The Farmer & Stockbreeder*, resting it on his knees and using his good left hand to turn the pages. It wasn't only that his right side was paralyzed, Dora thought, the stroke seemed to have killed his spirit, so that now he didn't really live,

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he only existed in a sort of limbo. He would sit for hours in his chair, staring out at the land he could no longer walk over, now so run down and neglected.

Even the Seventeenth Century farmhouse itself was beginning to look dilapidated. Dora could remember coming here when she was a little girl, playing in the sweet-smelling barns and round the stacks with her brother and sister, and being spoiled by her grandparents. It had been a sunny, welcoming place then, a mellow, delightfully uneven house, with its tiled roof and its dormer windows looking out from under the eaves like a mischievous little girl peeping out from under a fringe—you almost expected one of them to wink. Now it brooded, glowering at the world as if the events of thirty years ago had cast a spell over it. Plaster was dropping from its walls in places, exposing the brick beneath, and the cream wash was stained and unlovely. It made her want to cry.

It had all started on the night of that terrible storm. Mercifully, the old people were dead by then or the shock and disgrace might have been too much for them to bear. And her own parents had gone, too, killed in a motor accident one icy day the previous winter.

That dreadful night, Dora thought. It had been the next morning before she knew what had happened, and then it was only the garbled story she overheard in the village shop before the other customers saw her and suddenly stopped talking. Uncle Frank had been too shocked to phone, and she hadn't dared ring him. Then Arthur had come home for his dinner and told her, holding her close while he explained in his quiet, gentle way. Later the police had come and taken statements from them both, although there was little enough they could tell them.

Uncle had seemed to bear up under it fairly well, but he had never been one to show what he felt. It must have gone on building inside him until finally his system couldn't stand it any longer and he had the stroke. He had never spoken to her about that night from that day to this, and she had never mentioned it to him.

His father, old Jethro, had outlived his wife by only four months, and when he died he left six-thousand pounds to his daughter, Dora's mother, and the farm to his three sons, Frank, Ralph, and George. Frank, the eldest, was a born farmer, hard-headed and hard-working. They might say in the village now that he had been a cunning old bugger, talking about him as if he were already dead, but it was with something very like affection. They had made him into a char-

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acter, and perhaps half the stories they told about him were apocryphal.

Like the tale of his being pestered by the Inland Revenue because he hadn't submitted a tax return for at least three years and replying that he was writing on behalf of Mr. Cain, who was very ill and not expected to live much longer, and would they please stop writing to him. And they had.

The village loved that tale.

He hadn't been above driving a dubious bargain, either. Sometimes, they said, he went a bit further than he should have done. But they'd forgiven him long ago, and now they would recount his deals with as much relish as if all his victims had been tax inspectors. He lived for his land and he was a good farmer—they could forgive a lot of such a man.

His brothers were different. George was all right in his way. He might not be much of a worker, but there wasn't any real harm in him and he was still young. There was plenty of time for him to settle down.

Ralph, the middle brother, was different again. He worked hard when he felt like it, but you couldn't rely on him for anything—and he had a terrible temper. Especially when he had been drinking. Men avoided him then.

The farm meant nothing to Ralph. He wanted to be an engineer, and in his eyes the farm represented a lot of money tied up so that he couldn't get his hands on any of it. If he had had his way, they would have sold it—or at least sufficient of the land to buy out his share. But times were changing and the farm wasn't big enough to be viable if any of the land was sold. Small wonder that Frank had never had much use for his middle brother. And events had proved him right. A shrewd devil, Frank Cain, the village said knowingly.

The brothers lived alone. A girl came in from the village to clean and cook for them and do their laundry, but she went home at four o'clock. After it happened, she told the police that Ralph and George were always at loggerheads. Despite his indolence, George really cared for the land and Ralph was always on at him, badgering him to persuade Frank to agree to sell. More than once she saw them come to blows.

Then two things happened that changed the whole picture: George got himself engaged to Kathy Meadows and Ralph announced he was emigrating to Australia. In those days, the Australian govern-

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ment was looking for able-bodied Britons and willing to pay most of their passage money if they would settle there.

The district approved of both developments. Besides being pretty, Kathy was a sensible girl—she'd see that George settled down and would make something of him, given time. It didn't look as if Frank would get married now—he was thirty-eight and too set in his ways to change—and with Ralph gone, if George and Kathy had children, in time the farm would be theirs.

Only Kathy wasn't given time.

Afterward, some people maintained it was the storm that affected Ralph and sparked off the events of that terrible night. They claimed that his previous outbursts of violence had coincided with other storms. And since no one could remember for sure, the stories went unchallenged and soon many people accepted them as fact. Two things, however, were certain—he was leaving for Australia the next day and he had money on him. Quite a lot of money.

By seven o'clock that evening, an unnatural stillness had settled over the countryside. Angry black clouds massed on the horizon and there was an ominous yellow light. Men on their way home looked up at the sky and were thankful if they hadn't far to go. Soon a breeze sprang up—a gentle, insidious breeze that whispered over the fields, sighing in the growing corn and stirring the leaves on the big horse-chestnut tree near the house on Applegate Farm. Straw blew about the yard in agitated gusts and the cattle lowed uneasily in their barn.

Within another quarter of an hour, the wind was stronger and blowing harder every minute. Before long it was a gale, lashing the hedges and everything in its way as the clouds churned across the sky, blotting out the sun and bringing darkness before it was even dusk. Thunder muttered in the distance and lightning flashed.

The rain started just after eight. At first it was only a few heavy drops spattering the dry ground, but within minutes the drops had become a downpour and the yard was flooded. Frank came into the kitchen from the barn holding an old sack over his head and shoulders—it was soaked and letting the rain through before he had covered the thirty yards to the back door and he threw it on the floor, cursing.

He told the police later that he knew as soon as he entered the kitchen that Ralph and George were having another of their arguments. They were so frequent these days that he took no notice

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as he washed at the big old stone sink in the corner. He didn't know what the row was about, and he didn't care—he only wondered why they had to squabble on Ralph's last day at home. All the same, he had no doubt that Ralph had started the argument.

They settled down after a while, but the tension remained just below the surface. Frank could sense it still there when about nine o'clock they all had a couple of drinks to toast Ralph's future. The rain hadn't let up, and Ralph didn't take himself off to the pub in the village as he usually did after one of his spats with George. In any case, he had to leave very early in the morning, and soon after ten he announced he was going to bed. The others followed shortly afterward.

Frank lay awake for a long time that night—thinking, unable to sleep because of the racket made by the storm. By then its center was directly over the house and the crash of thunder was like a succession of heavy blows. People said afterward that it was the worst storm they could remember. Once it moved away up the valley, but soon it returned, the lightning forking over the farm, crackling viciously and illuminating the whole countryside.

It was during that brief lull, Frank told the inspector, that he heard George call out. He took no notice, because George occasionally had nightmares and when he did he sometimes shouted in his sleep. It didn't happen again, and eventually Frank dropped off.

By the time he woke the next morning, the storm had blown away and it was a bright, sunny morning with the promise of a fine day. He had forgotten about the cry he thought he'd heard during the night, and when he remembered it later he decided he must have been mistaken and the sound was a trick of the storm.

He was anxious about the effects of the wind and rain on their corn, and as soon as he had dressed he went downstairs. There was no sign of his brothers, but that didn't surprise him. Ralph must have left some time ago and George rarely appeared for another half hour, at least. Frank cooked himself some breakfast, ate it, and walked up to the top field to see how the wheat had stood up to the storm.

The police found him there twenty minutes later. Two of them had come, a sergeant named Thompson from Littlebourn whom Frank knew by sight and a younger constable. It was the sergeant who said he was afraid they had some bad news for him.

"Oh?" Frank said. Farmers were used to bad news and he didn't look too worried.

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"It's your brother George, sir. There's been an accident."

"George? An accident? What's happened?" Frank demanded.

"I'm afraid he's dead, sir," the sergeant told him. "I'm very sorry, Mr. Cain."

George had been found two hours before, slumped in the passenger seat of a car at the bottom of a chalk pit beside the Oxford road four miles from the farm. The car was partly burnt, but by some chance George's body had escaped the flames and there had been no difficulty in identifying him.

"Oh, God!" Frank breathed, his normally expressionless features shocked.

"It wasn't the crash killed him," the sergeant went on somberly, "at least it doesn't look like it was. There's a nasty deep wound on the back of his head. Something must have caught him a pretty heavy blow—and he can't have banged it on anything in the car. Not there."

Frank frowned. "What are you getting at? Are you saying somebody killed him?"

The sergeant's manner became more stolid than ever. He was wondering uneasily whether he had said too much already, and he would get a rollicking from the inspector. "That's not for me to say," he replied. "When did you last see your brother, Mr. Cain?"

"About ten last night."

"And your other brother, Ralph?"

"The same time. He's emigrating to Australia today. He had to leave by half five, and we were all in bed soon after ten."

"You didn't see either of your brothers after you went to bed?" the sergeant asked.

"No." It was then that Frank remembered the cry he had thought he heard during the night, but he said nothing about it until later when the inspector came to question him.

Sergeant Thompson looked thoughtful. Almost innocently, it seemed, he asked, "Do you know anybody who drives a green Austin 16, registration number YX4765?"

Frank stared at him. "That's Ralph's car. He was driving to the station in it this morning. He'd sold it to Ted Saunders in the village, and Ted was going to pick it up from there."

Sergeant Thompson nodded.

"Look here," Frank protested. "For God's sake, you can't think Ralph—"

"We don't think anything yet, sir," the sergeant told him. "We're

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just establishing the facts. That's all for the time being, then. Thank you, Mr. Cain. I'm sorry we had to bring you such bad news."

The two policemen said goodbye and left, driving away down the track to the road in their black Wolsley.

It was midafternoon when the inspector came. He was a CID man, and he asked a lot more questions. There wasn't a great deal Frank could tell him, except about the noise in the night. He said that at first he had thought it was George having one of his dreams, but afterward he put it down to the storm.

The inspector looked interested. "What time was that, Mr. Cain?"

Frank thought. "I don't know," he answered. "About three, I suppose."

"Did you hear Ralph leave this morning?"

"No. I must have been still asleep."

"And you didn't hear the car during the night?"

"No."

It was clear that despite Frank's assertion that, however aggressive he might sometimes seem, Ralph would never have harmed his brother, let alone kill him, the inspector believed he had. Especially after he more or less tricked Frank into admitting that Ralph and George had quarreled the previous evening.

"That Ralph sounds a violent bastard," he remarked to the sergeant in his office later.

"He is," Thompson agreed. He knew all about Ralph Cain.

"And unpredictable?"

"He's that, all right. Except you can rely on him turning nasty when something riles him." The sergeant had had a sound Methodist upbringing. "Cain by name and Cain by nature," he suggested.

Despite all their efforts, the police never traced Ralph. He hadn't sailed on the ship for which he had a ticket, but they were satisfied that he had left the country. A man answering to his description and traveling under the name of Smith had flown to Rio de Janeiro from Heathrow on a British South American Airways flight that morning, and he was never traced, either.

In the months that followed, Ralph was reported to have been seen in Sydney, Melbourne, Glasgow, and Manchester, but all the trails went cold. In time, the inspector retired and, four years later, died after a heart attack. Sergeant Thompson, too, retired, and after

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that there was no one left who was very interested in the whereabouts of Ralph Cain. Except Frank and Dora.

Coming downstairs from cleaning the bathroom, Dora saw the letter lying on the doormat and stooped to pick it up. She could tell from the franking on the envelope that the letter was from the bank, and she wondered what they wanted this time.

There had been a worrying number of letters from the bank recently. They couldn't all be statements, and Dora suspected that things were more serious than her uncle would admit. Not that he ever told her anything. It disturbed her sometimes that he didn't take her more into his confidence about his affairs now that he was so helpless. She could have dealt with a lot of things and saved him the worry. After all, it wasn't as if she were a stranger. He had known her since she was a little girl, and she had looked after him for the last ten years since Arthur died. But he didn't, and she had no intention of pressing him to.

"There's a letter for you, Uncle," she told him, taking it into his room and standing in front of him before she slit it open so that he could see she hadn't read it. Then, unfolding the single sheet of paper, she handed it to him. "I'm going to do the vegetables now. Is there anything you want before I go?"

He looked up at her, and it occurred to Dora that his appearance, with one side of his face frozen and immobile and his mouth twisted, no longer shocked her. It was so familiar that she only occasionally remembered to feel pity.

"No," he mumbled, the word distorted so that it was hardly intelligible. Even that required an effort.

Satisfied that he didn't need anything, Dora went out to the kitchen and busied herself preparing the new potatoes and peas she had brought in from the garden earlier. Reg Davies might let the farm go to the dogs, but the garden was her pride and joy, and she grew enough fruit and vegetables to keep them supplied for most of the year.

It was nearly an hour before she went back to see that her uncle was all right, and at first she saw nothing amiss. He was still sitting in his chair, staring out across the gently rising ground of the twenty-acre field where cows were grazing just as they had done for as long as Dora could remember. Then, stooping closer, she noticed a terrible rigidity about him and a glazed stare in his eyes.

"Uncle!" she said urgently.

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There was no answer. Horrified, she felt for his pulse. It was weak, but at least he was still breathing. Straightening up, she left him and hurried to the phone in the hall to ring Dr. Kershaw. To her relief, he was still at his surgery, and he promised to come out straightaway.

A little easier in her mind, Dora put down the phone and returned to her uncle. There was no change in him that she could see. Then she noticed the letter from the bank lying on the floor half under his chair where it must have fallen. She had been too upset to see it before. Now she picked it up and, after a moment's hesitation, she read it. As she did so, it seemed to Dora that her uncle's eyes watched her.

Doctor Kershaw arrived a quarter of an hour later.

"You know he's had a second stroke?" he asked, when he had examined the old man. Dora nodded. "Had he had a shock of any kind? Not that it probably made any difference, he was likely to have another one at any time."

"No," Dora said, "I don't think so." She couldn't tell the doctor about the letter from the bank.

Later, when the ambulance had taken her uncle to hospital and Dr. Kershaw had gone, she took it out of her pocket and read it again. She didn't understand all the legal terminology, but the meaning was painfully clear. The farm was mortgaged to the bank and her uncle had made no reduction in his borrowing for the last two years. As Mr. Waters put it, repayments of his loan had only been made at the expense of an increase in his overdraft. Worse, he had ignored their letters warning him that while they were sympathetic and wanted to be helpful, if he didn't do something to rectify the situation the bank would have no alternative but to call in his debt. Now they were going to exercise their right of sale and sell Twenty Acre.

They were being as fair as they could, Dora knew. That field hadn't been ploughed for over twenty years and, being close to the village and the road and with the near certainty of planning permission, it was far more valuable than the other land. Moreover, things had changed, and now selling it wouldn't affect the viability of the rest of the farm.

She looked out of the window at the cows grazing in the field. But even as she watched, the sun went in and the slope was cast into deep shadow. Dora shivered . . .

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During the weeks that followed, Frank Cain clung miraculously to the threads of life. The bank applied for and duly obtained from the district council planning permission for 250 houses to be built on Twenty Acre, and in due course the field was auctioned. Bidding was keen, for land with building consent was scarce in the district, and the buyer, a company from Oxford, paid more than they had expected to.

Their architects had already drawn up plans for the site. Within a month of completion of the sale, the council had approved them, and the following Monday the diggers moved in. Dora watched them from the house.

It was three days before they found Ralph. Or what was left of him. By evening, the whole village believed it knew the truth of what had happened thirty years before. But this time Dora was ahead of them.

Her Uncle Frank had put his whole life into the farm. He had behaved as if it were his, and his brothers were hired hands—what he said went. Then George became engaged and Frank must have seen his control threatened. Kathy Meadows was a strong-minded young woman and a farmer's daughter—she would see that George demanded more say in the running of things. Moreover, her family was progressive—they would put pressure on him to make changes. After all he had put into the farm, he would no longer be master.

The night of the storm, he must have seen his opportunity to rid himself of both his brothers and get the whole farm for himself for good. Perhaps their squabble that evening had given him the idea. If so, he must have been planning it even while he was drinking a toast to Ralph's future.

Whether it had or not, during the night he had got out of bed, killed both Ralph and George, and buried Ralph's body up on Twenty Acre, struggling against the force of the storm and the filthy mud. Then he had driven George's body to the chalk pit in Ralph's old Austin, set light to the car, and pushed it over the edge. That done, he had tramped the four miles home. There wouldn't have been much traffic on the road that night, but no doubt he had kept off it as much as he could.

What had he thought about during that dreadful walk? Dora wondered. Had he felt any regret, wished fervently he could undo what he had done? Had he felt any remorse during all the years since? Or any fear?

The telephone rang, and fearfully she went to answer it. It was

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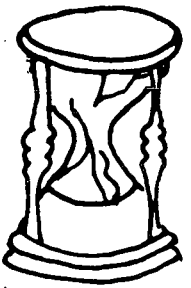
the hospital. They were very sorry, Mr. Cain had died that morning. They had tried to get in touch with her earlier to let her know, but they had had a bad storm in Oxford and the lightning had put their phones out of action for several hours.

"Thank you," Dora said dully. "I'll come over right away."

Ex-sergeant Thompson read about the discovery of Ralph Cain's body in the paper.

"We should have realized," he remarked to his wife. "Frank was a Cain, too."



DETECTIVERSE

HE'S ENTITLED

by WILLIAM C. THOMAS

Said the pickpocket, Edward MacNipper,
"Why, sir, I am no common clipper.
My hands are so sly
That they baffle the eye—
My peers call me the Big Dipper!"

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a *NEW* Inspector Donoghue story by

PETER TURNBULL

Dr. Reynolds, a tall, silver-haired pathologist, stared down at the body. "I daresay I would also get a fair degree of shock if I was shot in the head with a crossbow. Evil weapons."

"Sold quite openly." Donoghue reached into his pocket for his pipe. "Kids buy them."

"Sorry?" Dr. Reynolds turned to Donoghue.

"The crossbows. Children buy them and shoot cats and dogs and inevitably, one day, each other."

"Pleasant thought is that," said Reynolds . . .

THE MAN WHO WALKED TO NOWHERE

by PETER TURNBULL

It had been one rotten summer—even for the wet West of Scotland. It seemed that spring had extended through the year until autumn began with just one or two days of uninterrupted sunshine to remind Glaswegians that somewhere, at least, there was a summer to be enjoyed.

Now it was the end of September, the nights and early mornings were chilly, and leaves began to pile up against car windscreens and to block drains. A few diehards, mainly young women, clung to summer clothes as if refusing to give in to the inevitable and the inescapable, though most of the citizens pulled on woollens and hats and gloves in preparation for the vicious Scottish winter weather—which at the moment was probably massing somewhere inside the Arctic Circle in preparation for its assault on Northern Europe.

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There was in the city of Glasgow, as the wintery-looking sun played on the impressive stone buildings of the city center and on the awesome highrises of the peripheral schemes, an all-pervading sense of having been cheated of a summer. There was one young man in the city who had been cheated of something else, something bigger. He had been cheated of life itself—not by fate, premature death by natural causes, or by coming off his motorcycle. He had been cheated of life at the hand of another, who had shot him with a crossbow, leaving him among the shrubs near a street corner in a residential quarter of the West End, with the bolt of the crossbow sticking out of his forehead.

The body lay hidden from view just ten feet from a thoroughfare, close to the television station, a thoroughfare which was busy with pedestrians as well as motor vehicles. Schools were in session, so the children didn't play in the shrubs except at weekends and the body could have lain undiscovered for days. But it was found by a dog. It went into the bushes, didn't come when called, and stayed in there, whimpering and whining until its owner lost patience and strode into the shrubbery. Later, still in shock, the dog's owner said it wasn't the death, it wasn't even the crossbow bolt sticking out of the skull that upset him, it was the eyes. The eyes were open.

"I confess it is the sort of thing that would make you open your eyes." Dr. Reynolds, a tall, silver-haired pathologist, stared down at the body. "I daresay I would also get a fair degree of shock if I was shot in the head with a crossbow. Evil weapons."

"Sold quite openly." Donoghue reached into his pocket for his pipe, his favorite, with a slightly curved stem. There was a plug of tobacco in the bowl and he played the flame of his lighter over it. The aroma of his tobacco wafted through the shrubbery. He enjoyed a pipe, and particularly enjoyed smoking out-of-doors—and even more particularly enjoyed smoking in the stillness and rarefied air of an autumn day. He was a smartly dressed man, young at forty-one to hold the rank of Detective Inspector—nevertheless, he had been a cop long enough to now be able to enjoy a smoke when there was a corpse at his feet. "Kids buy them."

"Sorry?" Dr. Reynolds turned to Donoghue.

"The crossbows." Donoghue took his pipe from his mouth. "Children buy them and shoot cats and dogs and inevitably, one day, each other."

"Pleasant thought is that," said Reynolds.

"Could you estimate a time of death in this case, please?"

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Reynolds raised first one eyebrow, then lowered it, and then raised the second eyebrow and lowered it. It was a gesture Donoghue had not noticed before. "Well, rigor mortis is present in an advanced state, hastened by the chill in the night I daresay, and the maggots who are just surviving the cold are working hard. I would say perhaps thirty-six to forty-eight hours ago."

Donoghue glanced at his watch. "Three P.M. Wednesday. So the bolt was fired and crashed into the man's forehead sometime after three P.M. Monday and before three A.M. Tuesday. Do you think he was shot here?"

Reynolds shook his head. "That's really your department, as they say, but I shouldn't think so—too much foliage and low branches. You also see that he's lying flat on his back with his arms by his side, almost as if he had been laid out. My guess is that if he were left where he fell, he'd be in a crumpled heap, most probably on his back but possibly not. It's conceivable he could have staggered forward for a few steps before collapsing forward and ending up lying face down. No, I would be inclined to think he was shot out there on the pavement and then dragged in here and left under the bushes. If you clear away the leaves which fell in the last two days, you might find that the earth has been scored by his boots. You might also find indentations made by the killer's heels as he or she or they dragged their kill into the shrubs."

Donoghue felt himself seem to shrink momentarily and did not like the smile that Reynolds allowed himself. "Ray," he called.

"Yes, sir." Raymond Sussock turned and faced Donoghue. He was older than Donoghue, junior in rank.

"Have these leaves cleaned away, please—say, in a line from feet to the pavement. We're looking for indentations caused by footwear."

"Sir." Sussock called and walked toward a sergeant of the uniformed branch.

"I'll wait until you locate the spoor and then I'll have the body removed from the shrubs by another exit so we don't trample the foot casts," Reynolds said.

"Thank you, sir." Donoghue tried to hide his anger, believing the pathologist had succeeded in telling him how to do his job. He walked back to his car just as two police constables, moving gently despite their bulk, began to brush the leaves away from the ground at the shrubbery, clearing a path from the body to the pavement.

There were, as Dr. Reynolds predicted, two indentations scored into the soil and grass patches where the victim's boots had been

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dragged across the surface, and at either side of the two lines were a series of indentations clearly caused by the heels of the shoes of the man or woman who may, or may not, have shot the young man with a crossbow but who had most certainly dragged the body from the pavement into the shrubs. One or two of the indentations were conveniently in relatively soft soil.

"Plaster of paris, please." Ray Sussock addressed the scene-of-crimes officer.

Fabian Donoghue remained at the locus of the offense until the body had been taken away on a stretcher covered with a sheet and placed in the rear of a black windowless van, which drove away slowly through a gap in the crowd which had been drawn to the scene by the flurry of police activity. Donoghue also remained at the scene until he was satisfied that plaster casts had been taken of the deepest and clearest indentations caused by the shoes of the person who had dragged the body into the shrubs, leaving Ray Sussock to organize a detailed search of the shrubbery.

He drove the short distance from the locus of the offense in the bed-sit/university area in the West End of Glasgow to P Division Police Station at Charing Cross at the bottom of Sauchiehall Street. He peeled off his coat and hung it and his hat on a stand and glanced out of his office window. Sauchiehall Street was busy, pavements packed with pedestrians, the orange buses of Strathclyde Regional Council Passenger Transport Executive crawling bumper to bumper with the brilliantly colored, always cleanly kept blue-and-yellow double-deckers of the Kelvin Scottish Bus Company—the smaller company that tries harder. Rush hour was just beginning. A lot of people with a lot of problems.

There was one guy, thought Donoghue, whose problems, whatever they might have been, were all over. He would be at that moment on the stainless-steel table with a two-inch lip around the edge and a drain running down the central pedestal that supported the table. He would be naked save for the towel, stiff with disinfectant, that would be draped over his "private parts" and a six-inch metal crossbow part would be being removed from his skull.

Donoghue knew it was going to be a long night. He'd always told younger officers that if they wanted to punch time cards, then they ought not to have joined the police, and in that respect rank held no privileges. He picked up the phone and called home to his wife in Edinburgh. He said he'd be working late and, no, he didn't know

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what time he'd be home. She sighed, as she always sighed on such occasions, said there would be a casserole in the oven, and hung up without saying goodbye.

He sat at his desk and cleaned out the bowl of his pipe, tapping the ash into the huge black ashtray he kept on his desk. He refilled the pipe, lit it, and read over the reports on his desk—a burglary investigation, a spate of car thefts—reports prepared in respect of charged persons, awaiting his signature before being submitted to the Procurator Fiscal. There was an application for fourteen days' leave by P. C. Richard King. This last he approved immediately. King was a good cop, well in the frame for promotion to Detective Sergeant, and he hadn't had a proper holiday this year and now it was September. Already. (Donoghue felt that holidays were not luxuries but necessities, and even then CID cops never got a break from work, whether skiing on the Alps or lapping up the sun on the Italian beaches. Plainclothes cops never got away from it, they always took their cases with them, carrying them inside their heads, often finding themselves thinking of work instead of enjoying the holiday.)

It was all routine paperwork and it was all Donoghue could do until the murder inquiry, still at present just an empty file with a case number, was furnished with reports, photographs—and, especially, furnished with a name.

Richard King had drawn the late shift this week. This morning he had offered to address himself to the cupboards he had promised to build in the kitchen, but Rosemary—his quiet, soft-spoken Quaker wife, who wore her hair in a bun, favored pastel shades in her clothes, and never, ever, wore jeans—said that as she had waited for nearly a year she could, she thought, manage to wait a little longer. So they both and their child, Iain, sat in a circle on the living-room floor poring over holiday brochures. Iain chose Yugoslavia because of a photograph of a donkey on a beach. So Yugoslavia it was. King kissed his wife and his child, pulled on a jacket, and went to work. He was bearded, chubby, twenty-five years old, and short for a cop. He drove to work, left his car in the car park, and walked into the building, signing in at the uniform bar.

"Inspector Donoghue wants to see you." P. C. Piper, the bar officer, smiled at him. "As soon as you come in."

"As soon as I come in?"

"As soon as you come in, that's what he said."

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"Well," said King, setting the pen back on the duty book, "if that's what he said." He went upstairs to the CID corridor, stopped off in the small office he shared with Montgomerie and Abernethy, slung his jacket on his chair, and went down the corridor to Detective Inspector Donoghue's office. He tapped on the door.

"Gerald McIntyre," said Donoghue when King had sat in the chair in front of his desk—not a gesture of approval lightly given.

"I'm sorry, sir," said King, running a rapid trace of the files in his head. McIntyre. A witness, a victim?

"Does the name mean anything to you?"

King regretted it did not, sir.

"Dull sort of name, isn't it?" said Donoghue, leafing through the file, which, since he had begun the routine paperwork, had begun to fill with notes made during telephone conversations with investigating officers and with black-and-white photographs, still tacky from the developing tray.

"Ordinary," said King.

"Like the names of most people," Donoghue grunted. "Here's his photograph." He handed a photo print to King.

"Well, well," said King and Donoghue enjoyed his restraint, knowing King was seeing a young man's small, West of Scotland face, pale hair, open eyes, and the crossbow bolt.

"He was found earlier today in a shrubbery. The body had been hidden from view but not otherwise concealed. No weapon has been found yet. All we know is his name and address." Donoghue reached into the file and picked up the notes he had made when D. C. Montgomerie had phoned him from the Glasgow Royal Infirmary. The notes contained the basic findings to date and he thought ruefully that when Montgomerie's report was submitted, it would not be any fuller than the information he'd given over the phone, and that had been sparse enough. "You'll have to start the legwork on this, King," said Donoghue. "I'm afraid the first step is the most difficult. His I.D. has been ascertained by a social-security card that was found in his pocket. It has to be confirmed. It's a next-of-kin job. I'm sorry, but it has to be done."

"Of course, sir, I'll get on it right away." King opened his notebook and began to take particulars.

"That's the first step. See what you can dig up about the deceased, see if he offended the religion of a crossbow-owning fiend or something. Montgomerie's doing the rounds of the sporting-goods shops with the crossbow bolt in his pocket." Donoghue glanced at his

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watch. "He'll need to get a move on. It's four-thirty and he's only got an hour before the shops pull down the shutters for the night. I'd like to get an idea of what sort of person buys a weapon like this, if nothing else. I'd *like* the names and addresses of everybody in the city who has bought one."

Gerald McIntyre had lived in a flat on Otago Street. He shared it with eight others, as King was to find, and, as he was further to find, all unemployed. King climbed the stair and pressed the bell of the door with "McIntyre" among other names cellotaped to it. He didn't hear the bell ring, so he rapped the knocker. The door was opened by an unshaven young man in a T-shirt and a pair of shorts: the sort of person who just does not feel the cold. He stood in the doorway blinking at King.

"Police," said King, holding up his I.D.

"Polis," said the man. King noted that he was in his mid-thirties and gave the impression that life was going past him at a rate of knots. Maybe it had gone already. In the West of Scotland, you are, these days, as far as you're going to get in life by the time you reach thirty.

"Yes," said King. "Police."

"You want something?"

"A little information."

"Such as?"

"About a guy called McIntyre who lives here."

"He's not here right now."

"I know," said King.

"You lifted him again, aye?"

"Again? Know him, do we?"

"Well, you should know that better than me."

"Refresh my memory."

"Nothing serious—just a bit of ducking and diving, bobbing and weaving, you know."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"No. We haven't seen him for two days now. He's away some of the time, that's *his* business. He does it now and again, takes off, maybe finds a lassie, he'll be back soon."

"Perhaps," said King. "Perhaps not."

"What do you mean?"

"Who's his next of kin?" King had avoided the question, but he noticed the man's eyes harden into a look of steely suspicion.

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"His mother. She stays in Milton."

His mother. It would have to be his mother. It seemed to King that he never got a next of kin who was a brother or a sister or wife or husband, but he always had to ask a mother to identify her deceased infant. Even when the deceased was well into his twenties or older, no matter how old, it was a mother's infant. "Do you have her address?"

The man reeled off a number and a street. King wrote it down. "Gerald in some trouble?"

"Can't say," said King. "Not yet. I'll have to come back, though. Are you and the rest of the flat going to be in later?"

"How much later?"

"Two hours, three hours."

The man nodded. "Two or three hours, I reckon we'll be here—reckon we'll be able to spare you ten minutes out of our busy day."

"Good of you," said King. He went back down the stair and into Otago Street. This was the West End of Glasgow—small restaurants, antique shops, bed-sit land, always lots of people in the street. King's eye was caught by one man—short, very short, with silver hair and short, thin legs. He walked purposefully, striding along the pavement, staring straight ahead. King thought that if he moved any faster he would be running.

King drove out to the Milton, a housing scheme covering two or three hillsides, mainly densely packed low-rise dwellings but with three massive highrise developments tearing against the sky. Mrs. McIntyre lived alone in one of the highrises, on the seventeenth floor. Hers was a cleanly kept flat, just two rooms and a kitchen. To King's eyes it was annoyingly neat. There was a photograph of the Queen on the wall above the fireplace.

"He was my only son, my only child," she said as the mortician replaced the sheet and slid the drawer back into the wall. The woman began to walk away, shaking, fighting back the tears.

"Better let it come out," said King, and the woman, needing no further prompting, stopped walking and began to let the tears flood down her cheeks.

Later, in the car driving Mrs. McIntyre back to the Milton, King asked about her late son.

"He was a pure waster," she said. "He was my son, but he was a pure waster. He did nothing. He never worked in his life—never. He left school when he was fifteen. He was going to be twenty-seven

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next month and he never knew work. After a while it got impossible for him to look for work, you know? He got more than work-shy, he was frightened of it. It was more than being lazy, it was a genuine fear."

"It's not uncommon," said King. "If you're out of work for very long it's almost impossible to go back."

"He and the other young people in that flat in the West End," she said. "All in the same boat—not working, not looking for it, either. Getting up late in the day, having a meal, going to the pub just half an hour before it shuts so they don't spend all their welfare money on booze, sitting up into the wee small hours smoking cigarettes, playing records, then climbing into bed. There isn't a lot of work in Glasgow, and for people like that there isn't any. They're the sort of people who have children in order to boost the welfare check and get a house from the city.

"Gerald was a disappointment to me and his father. My man, Gerald's father, see him, he worked all his days in the shipyards, so he did—he brought home a regular wage, so he did, and he lived for his retirement so he could spend his days playing bowls. The very day before he was due to retire, he lost his footing and fell nearly a hundred and fifty feet into the drydock. He just didn't have any luck in life."

"There's no justice," said King. "I'm very sorry."

"Gerald was a disappointment to him, and an embarrassment. One day there was an awful row between the two of them and my man told him to get out of the house, he wasn't to live off us any more. So he left. Went first to a homeless-persons' hostel and then he moved into a flat, then another flat, and just last year he moved into his present address."

"Any enemies?"

Mrs. McIntyre shook her head. "Not that I know of. He was my son, but he was pathetic. Pathetic people don't have enemies, they just get laughed at. Only successful people have enemies."

Montgomerie strode down Argyle Street. He was tall and handsome and he walked with long effortless strides. As he walked, he enjoyed, as he had enjoyed since the age of seventeen, the admiring glances of women as he passed them. There was an urgency in his step—it was by then 1630 hours and the shops would be shutting in an hour's time. He had to get round as many sports shops as he could before they shut. His next call was to Smith and Co., Gunsmith,

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established 1897. He entered the shop, which was lined with racks of shotguns and rifles, waterproof clothing, wicker bags—all items, in fact, that could be of use to the sporting user of firearms.

"Never touch them," said the man—small, neatly turned out, grey suit and (unbelievably in the closing years of the Twentieth Century) a monocle—sniffing at the crossbow bolt Montgomerie had dropped on the counter. "Evil things, have no sporting use at all. The Army uses them, did you know that?"

Montgomerie confessed that he did not, intrigued to learn that the modern Army trained to use weapons of mass destruction should find a use for a medieval tool of warfare.

"Oh, yes—types much more powerful than those on sale to the public, but crossbows nonetheless. The infantry use them to kill sentries silently."

"I see."

"But we take the selling of guns seriously, Mr. Montgomerie. We sell nothing that has no sporting use. Pump-action shotguns, revolvers, automatic rifles, knives with serrated upper edges, and crossbows have no use at all for the sportsman so we don't stock them."

"I'm running against time," said Montgomerie. "I'd like to try and find the shop which sold this, if it was bought in the city, before the shops shut. My inquiries are in connection with a serious incident and we'd lose a lot of precious time if we have to wait until the shops open again in the morning. Could you point me in the right direction?"

"I'm ashamed that I even know the name of the shop," said the man. Then: "In fact, I don't think I do know the name, after all—just of the shop's existence. It's at Glasgow Cross. The window's full of weapons, not sportman's requisites." Montgomerie said he was grateful.

He found the shop without difficulty and was surprised that as a cop he did not previously know of its existence. The window was, as Mr. Smith of Smith & Co. said, full of weapons. Knives, hideous to Montgomerie's eyes, with wide blades a foot long with serrated upper edges. Powerful air rifles designed to look like famous rifles such as the cowboy's rifle, the Winchester, and the British Lee-Enfield of World War II fame. There were imitation revolvers and automatic pistols, cut-throat razors, and racks of crossbows of varying dimensions. So far as Montgomerie was concerned, the gun law of Great

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Britain could not be screwed down firm enough, but he reflected as he stood staring at the array of viciousness in the shop window that it was not at all impossible to get hold of a weapon just as lethal as a pistol in this right little tight little isle, gun laws or no gun laws.

He went into the shop. There was just one man behind a long counter. The man was small, with slicked-down hair, and he had a strange smile in his eyes. Montgomerie easily pictured him as a little boy pulling wings off flies.

"Police," said Montgomerie.

The man raised his eyebrows. "I'll come quietly."

"It's no joke." Montgomerie laid the crossbow bolt on the counter. "Recognize this?"

"I sell them," said the man.

"I've noticed. What sort of crossbow does this come from?"

"One of the large ones," the man told Montgomerie. "Though it could fit a number of crossbows, it's the sort we sell with crossbows that have a forty-five-pound to fifty-pound pull."

"A fifty-pound pull?"

"Yes, the bolt will leave the bow at over a hundred miles an hour. The bolt is six inches long, made of metal, as you can see, and weighs about eight ounces. It can pass straight through a melon at fifty paces. —There are smaller bows."

"I'm relieved to hear it."

"So what can I do for you?"

"Sold any crossbows that could fire this bolt lately?"

"Quite a lot."

"How much is a lot?"

"Twenty last week, or thereabouts."

"What sort of people buy them?"

"Odd people. I don't like them at all—they seem to have a strange smile in their eyes."

Funny you should say that, thought Montgomerie. "Do you keep a record of people you sell them to?"

"Not all of them. Many pay cash—often it's like they don't want to leave their identities. Sinister, really."

"So why sell them at all?"

"If I didn't, somebody else would. You have to make a living somehow."

"There are other ways."

"Are you a moral crusader or a cop?"

Montgomerie let it ride. "Do any of these sinister people stick in

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your mind particularly? I ask because this bolt was dug out of somebody's head earlier today. They cleaned the bits of brain off before they gave it to me to walk around town with."

"That's heavy."

"Very heavy," agreed Montgomerie. "The guy who stopped it wasn't very happy with the idea, either."

"He wouldn't be," said the man. "I guess it was really only a matter of time before somebody got killed."

"So can you remember selling this type of weapon to anyone whose strange look in the eyes was particularly murderous?"

"I remember selling one to a big, fat lady. She came into the shop all pearls and fur coat with two little dogs. I thought she might be in to buy a lady's razor, but out she goes with a crossbow under her arm. She paid cash, so I don't know her name. One of the dogs was called Mitzi, but I guess that doesn't help you."

"Is there anyone else you remember?"

"Two days ago—let's see, it's Wednesday now, yes, two days ago, Monday morning—I hate Mondays, don't you hate Mondays?—this guy comes into the shop. He was an oddball—sort of strutted. He was oldish, maybe fifty, maybe more. He bought a crossbow, paid for it in dirty, crumpled pound notes, like he'd pulled them from a mattress."

"So you didn't get his name, either?"

The man shook his head. "I remember him because the look in his eyes was something different from the rest. Usually people who buy sheath knives and crossbows seem to have a sort of self-satisfied look about them—you know, the look of a powerful person?"

"A hunter?"

"Yes, a hunter. But this guy was just the opposite. He had cold, frightened eyes that darted around like he was being hunted."

"Can you describe him?"

"Well, he was short and had longish grey hair that covered the top of his ears and his collar. He wore old clothes—sort of layers and layers of shirts but no sweater, and a jacket, a pair of jeans, and some old shoes. But strong shoes."

"You remember a lot about him."

"Well, he stuck in my mind. I watched him leave and walk off down Argyle Street. He had a funny walk, as though he was in a hurry, likely to break into a run at any time, but his appearance was such that now I think about it I don't think he really had

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anywhere to go at all. I never saw him before and haven't seen him since."

"Thanks, anyway," said Montgomerie.

Montgomerie left the shop. Rush hour was at its peak. He seemed to be swimming against a human tide. The shops would be shutting in quarter of an hour. Too late to find another shop that sold cross-bows.

He went to Makepeace's. He went to see Susan.

"Off early?" she said, leaning forward to rinse glasses.

"Still on duty." Montgomerie sat on a bar stool. "Got time for a quick one. I'm entitled to a break, anyway, according to Scottish Office regulations."

"Pint?"

"Gin and tonic." Montgomerie shifted on the stool. "Doesn't linger on the breath as much as beer. Breaks are one thing, drinking on duty is another."

Susan was wearing a smart low-cut crimson dress with a matching hat. It was the uniform of the girls who worked at Makepeace's. She placed the drink in front of him and he laid a five-pound note on the bar.

"So when do you get off?" she said. "I finish at seven—not before time, too. It's dragged in here all day."

"It's getting busy now." Montgomerie glanced around at the office workers, male and female, having a quick going-home drink at the end of the working day, and a group of men who seemed to be settling down to a troughing session that looked set to last all evening.

"Yes," Susan nodded, "the last two hours will go quickly enough, they always do. Look, Malcolm, when are we going out? You worked late last night and you look like you'll be working late tonight. I draw the late shift next week—finish at midnight for five days on the trot. Just two more evenings to myself, so how about it?"

"Well, maybe tonight. Depends. I won't know before you finish."

"You expect me to sit in and wait for your call?"

"I can't promise to finish early, Sue." Montgomerie sipped his g-and-t. "I'm supposed to finish at six, but there's a murder inquiry on and these things go on until they're finished. Fabian will be saying—"

"Who's Fabian?"

"Detective Inspector Donoghue—the boss, big chief. Heap big slave driver as well. He'll be telling the other day-shift boys that if

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they wanted to punch a time card they shouldn't have joined the police. It's a favorite expression of his. I daresay he's right."

"So where does that leave us?"

"I can only promise to call as soon as I'm free."

"Well, I'm not sitting at home all evening waiting for the phone to ring, I told you that before. I'll stay in until eight-thirty. If you haven't phoned by then, I'll go and see a girl friend and I daresay we'll go out for a drink and a good natter."

Montgomerie stood and drained his glass. "A policeman's lot."

Donoghue left his office, pulling on his coat as he walked down the CID corridor. Professor Jean Kay at the Forensic Science Laboratory at Pitt Street had phoned him with the results of the casts taken of the footprints in the soil at the locus of the offense. Did he want them over the phone prior to the written report? No, thank you, he said, he'd been sitting in his office long enough, a walk would clear his head, enable him to think. Very well, she'd see him in about ten minutes.

"Size six, and a man's shoe," she said. She was a small, frail-looking woman in her sixties. She never made any secret of the fact that she was a Christian and always seemed to radiate warmth from the sensation of enjoying a peace which passeth all understanding. She ran her fingers over the casts, six in all. "It's the next smallest size before you get into the children's sizes."

"Belongs to a small man." Donoghue sucked on his unlit pipe. Dr. Kay disapproved of smoking and certainly didn't permit it in her laboratories.

"I would think so," Dr. Kay nodded. "Also, he's a man who does a lot of walking. You see these lines here around the side of this cast? They're made by a replacement heel, he's had his shoes resoled and reheeled. Similarly, do you see the angle at the edge of the heel? That's an indication that the heels are worn again, probably ready for another reheeling."

"I see." Donoghue took the pipe from his mouth. "It might also indicate that the man we're looking for hasn't got a lot of spare cash—a bit short on pennies if he has to keep reheeling his shoes."

"That's a dangerous assumption. I am not a poor person, Inspector, but I have a pair of shoes I've owned for nearly fifteen years. I wear them regularly and I've lost count of the number of times I've had them resoled and reheeled. But I do concede that this person may be a little short of cash as well as stature. The other point I'll make

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in my report is that the owner of these shoes has very strong legs and that should tie in with the amount of walking he does."

"How can you tell that?"

"By the depth of the indentations. The soil is hard at this time of the year—little rain, and near-freezing at night. I understand that this man was dragging a body, but even so he must have had considerable strength to dig his heels as deep as that into such consolidated soil." Donoghue nodded. It made sense. It made very good sense.

Montgomerie caught the tube to St. George's and went to the Gay Gordon at the bottom of Maryhill Road. The Gay Gordon was a tough, rough pub where chairs and tables were chained to the floor and the upholstered benches were slashed to ribbons, where men and women drank themselves senseless on cheap wine and slumped unconscious across the benches and the landlord didn't give a damn.

Tuesday Noon sat underneath a color TV mounted high on the wall. It was a children's hour on the BBC, how to make puppets, beamed all the way from London. It might as well have been beamed into the Gay Gordon from another planet. Montgomerie sat opposite Tuesday Noon with a glass of whisky in each hand. Noon grinned an almost toothless grin. He had a black mouth with just a few yellow pegs going up and down. He drained the whisky neat in one slug, then he pushed the glass back across the table toward Montgomerie.

"Not so fast, Tuesday." Montgomerie picked up the lemonade bottle and added some to the whisky, about half and half. "I need information as always," he said. "A guy was filled in two nights ago, maybe less. We discovered the body just this afternoon—crossbow bolt right in the middle of his forehead. Wondered if you knew of any punters with a crossbow?"

"No, Mr. Montgomerie, I don't."

"Keep your ear to the ground, Tuesday. There's a drink in it for you if you come up trumps."

"A crossbow," said Tuesday Noon, "a crossbow."

"Evil things." Montgomerie threw back his whisky and lemonade. "Nothing to stop you buying one for the children at Christmas so they can kill each other. Call me if you hear anything, Tuesday."

King went back to Gerald McIntyre's flat. The door was answered by a thin young woman with short black hair, black T-shirt, black

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stretch tights, black running shoes. "They call me Happy," she said after King had identified himself and had asked her name. "If you've come about Gerald—well, he's not back yet."

"Yes, I have," King said. "He won't be coming back, I'm afraid. May I come in?"

Happy began to pale. A man came to the door and stood behind her. Happy told him Gerald wouldn't be coming back.

"No?" said the man.

"No," said King. "I'm afraid he's dead."

"Dead! How?"

"Murdered." King remained deadpan. "He was shot with a crossbow."

"Oh!" said Happy. "Oh!"

"Mrs. McIntyre identified his body just about an hour ago. I'd like to see his room, talk to you about him."

"Sure—sure." The man and Happy stood to one side and King entered the flat.

"Which is his room?"

"The one at the end of the hall," said the man. He led King down the corridor. As they walked, a man stepped out of a room and glared at King. Happy, by the way of explanation, said, "He's a cop. Gerald's dead."

The glaring man said, "That so?" and went back into his room.

Gerald McIntyre's room was small and had a high ceiling and a large window. It would be difficult to heat in the winter months. There were photographs of cars and aeroplanes on the wall, taken from magazines, and there were children's comics scattered on the floor. The unmade bed, King noticed, had sheets of newsprint between the sheets of linen. "He liked to read comics," said Happy. "I think he liked to pretend he was a little boy again. In the summer he'd wear short trousers."

"Odd," said King.

"He was a little," Happy nodded.

"No, I meant it was odd that somebody so immature should live in a bed-sit. Most people in bed-sits grow up pretty quickly or they don't survive."

"Well, he really wanted to go back to his mother in the Milton, but she wouldn't have him. He went up once or twice a week for a feed, but she wouldn't let him even stay overnight."

"Did he have enemies?"

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"No," said the man, "not Gerald. No enemies at all. Not many friends, either, but no enemies."

"Somebody didn't like him," said King. "Did he ever give anyone a hard time?"

The man shook his head, but Happy said, "Only the man who walks to nowhere."

"Who's he?"

"Some guy," said the man. "You see him round the West End every day, rain or shine, strutting about. He's a sad case, really."

"He's a poor lonely man," said Happy. "Gerald was cruel to him. I didn't like Gerald for that. I didn't like him for what he did to that man."

"What did he do?" King asked.

The man elucidated. "This guy who walks around all day, he's mad. He doesn't stroll around the way the rest of us do. He almost runs—he gives the impression he's got somewhere to go and he can kid people on any given stretch of pavement that he's in a hurry to get someplace. But in fact he's got nowhere to go at all and he's got all the time in the world. You know that because if you stand on any street corner in the West End you'll see him maybe half a dozen times in the space of as many hours, walking hurriedly as though he's got an urgent job to do. He must leave his flat early in the morning, and I once saw him close to midnight—but he'd slowed up some by then."

"So what did Gerald do to him?"

"Poked fun at him in the street—laughed at him loudly and said, 'See that guy? He just goes round and round all day. Don't you ever pee, wee man?' People turned to look and the guy broke into a run. He did it when we were with him, so Happy and I walked away. Guys like that just want to be left alone, but Gerald would walk alongside him, trying to force him to talk, not letting up."

Happy said, "Sometimes Gerald would come back to the flat grinning and tell us he'd larked that guy again, meaning he'd given him a hard time. Sometimes he'd get bored sitting in the flat and he'd say he was going out to find that little guy."

"Where does this guy live?" said King. "I think I saw him today."

The man shrugged his shoulders. Happy said, "You don't really need to know where he lives—he's never there, anyway, spends his day pounding the streets around here, never ventures out of the West End."

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"Did Gerald say where he was going when he left the flat the last time?"

"No." Happy shook her head. "He just went out. He could have seen this guy and decided to have his own cheap kind of fun. But you know it might *not* have been this guy—he never carries anything, and you can't conceal a crossbow very easily."

"That had occurred to me," said King.

"It's easy enough," said the man. "All he'd have to do is hide it someplace up a derelict close or in some bushes, and if Gerald was giving him a hard time, walking alongside him and all, he would just have to walk to where he'd hidden the crossbow and it's goodnight, Vienna."

King went back to P Division. In the room they shared, he found Montgomerie at his desk writing a report. "Anything?" King asked him.

"Possibly either a fat lady with two little dogs or a short guy who almost runs as he walks."

"Funny you should say that," said King.

They found the man later that day, just as dusk was turning into dark. He was, as he had been described, a small man with a purposeful walk, the same man King had seen earlier that day as he was leaving Gerald McIntyre's flat in Otago Street. King and Montgomerie were in an unmarked car. Two uniformed officers followed them in a panda car. They pulled up alongside the man and the four officers got out and stood in front of him.

"He laughed at me once too often," said the man who walked to nowhere.

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QUALITY NAMES AT QUALITY PRICES! Fresh opportunity seekers available for immediate shipment! D-CO, 1-219-838-7099/ 1-800-992-9405.

NEW NAMES MONTHLY! MIXED STATES AVAILABLE! IMMEDIATE SHIPMENT! Adhesive Labels; Computerized—Guaranteed Opportunity Seekers 200/$15; 500/$25; 1000/$40. Others. Advon, Drawer B3, Shelley, ID 83274. Visa/MC/AmEx. 1-800-992-3866.

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information? Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

EARN $5,000 ANY WEEKEND! Amazing new system makes it easy. No money needed. Skeptical? FREE PROOF. Write: Crossroads, Box 5097-B12, Babylon, NY 11707.

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$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: SEVENSTAR, Box 187-D, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

EARN $15 to $50 an hour with a pickup truck or van. Tuller's Treasures, 958 College Ave., Elmira, NY 14901.

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FREE details! Moneymaking information. GRAY, 4830 So. 137th St. #72, Dept. AA9, Omaha, Nebraska 68137.

EARN Extra income. Stuff 1000 envelopes for $1000.00. SASE: Clemens Enterprises, 3528 Esplendor, Irving, Texas 75062.

EASY Business, earn $1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope: Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for $500.00 weekly? Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

THERE IS NO CHARGE FOR THE ZIP CODE: please use it when ordering merchandise from classified advertisements. You'll receive faster delivery.

PERSONAL

SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced? Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people! 18-80, Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

NATIONWIDE Singles Magazine. Send Name, Address, Age. Send No Money. Exchange, 1817 Welton #1580, Denver, Colo. 80202.

SINCERE Ladies seeking marriage minded gentlemen. Details: Marstell, P.O. Box 933, Newport News, VA 23607.

YOU'LL MAKE MONEY

SAVE MONEY TOO— BY READING and ANSWERING THESE CLASSIFIED ADS

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PERSONAL—Cont'd

ASIAN WOMEN desire Romance! Sunshine International Correspondence—Dept. HF, Box 260, North Hollywood, CA 91603. (818) 769-1717.

READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls," Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth $2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send $2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage. Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

SINGLES, US/WORLDWIDE, seek enlightened correspondence, sincere friendships. SCANNA INTERNATIONAL-CO3, Box 4, Pittsford, NY 14534.

DISABLED white man, 24, wishes correspondence with women. Richard Markowski, 8000 West Brentwood Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53223.

FREE!! 100 photos marriage-minded girls, including American. Moore-IO, Englewood, FL 34295-0056.

BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE. American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

SONGWRITERS

POEMS WANTED. Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

TAPES & CASSETTES

OLDTIME radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

HEAR Ellery Queen Come Alive On Cassette! Exclusive to Ellery Queen Readers. Original radio broadcasts of the famous show "The Adventures of Ellery Queen". Our first offering: "The Scarecrow and the Snowman" Complete with original commercials. You also receive 25 of Ellery Queen's famous minute mysteries. All 26 mysteries for only $8.95. Send to: Famous Detectives, P.O. Box 36327, Denver, CO 80236. Free catalog included.

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THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY: Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures, MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR FICTION COMBINATIONS:

OR TRY ONE OF OUR OTHER COMBINATIONS:
Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.
For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

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CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING ORDER FORM

Send to **ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE**
Classified Advertising Department/Suite 1401
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME_____

FIRM (NAME IN AD)_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY_____ **STATE**_____ **ZIP**_____

PHONE:_____ **DATE:**_____

YOUR SIGNATURE_____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ .....

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each _____
Total amount for 1 ad $

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 = $ _____
(b) Multiply total amount on above line by x .85
(c) *Total amount for 3 ads* $

(Example: One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months = $144.00 x .85 = $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
(6) **$48.00**	(7) **$48.00**	(8) **$48.00**	(9) **$48.00**	(10) **$48.00**
(11) **$48.00**	(12) **$48.00**	(13) **$48.00**	(14) **$48.00**	(15) **$48.00**
(16) **$51.20**	(17) **$54.40**	(18) **$57.60**	(19) **$60.80**	(20) **$64.00**
(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. *Each initial or number counts as 1 word:* Mark Holly, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017: 7 WORDS: Zip codes are not counted. Phone #: 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each.: Garden City, New York: 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D., F.O.B., P.O., U.S.A, 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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NEXT ISSUE...

14 *NEW* stories—including

JULIAN SYMONS (about the Borgia heirloom)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Captain Leopold)

RUTH RENDELL (about dying happy)

HENRY SLESAR (about destiny)

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Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope. The Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1930, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario N8Y3L1. ISSN: 0013-6328.

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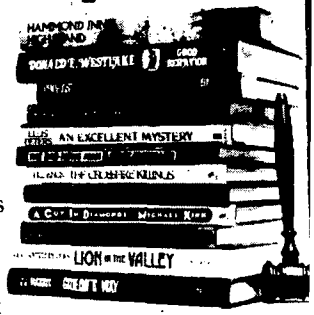
Take 12 Best-Selling Mysteries for Only $1



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Try 12 mysteries. We're sure your verdict will be favorable. They're worth $174.40 in publishers' editions—but to introduce you to The Detective Book Club, we'll send you *all 12* spine-tingling novels in four hardbound triple-volumes *for only $1 plus shipping.*

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club there is no minimum number of books you must buy. You may reject any selection before or after you receive it, and you may cancel at any time with no obligation whatsoever.

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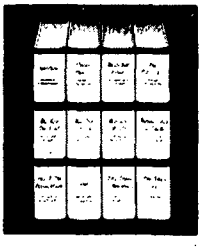
Simply fill out the coupon below and send it to: The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, NY 11576. You'll enjoy a 10-day free trial to examine the evidence and judge for yourself with no obligation. But *act now.* If you love good mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



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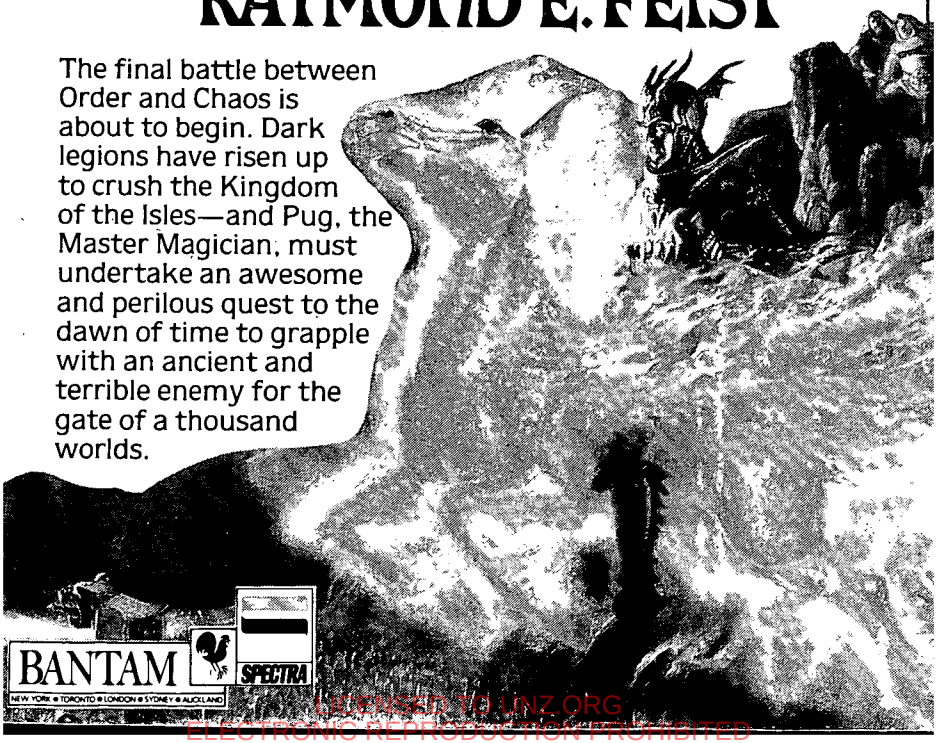

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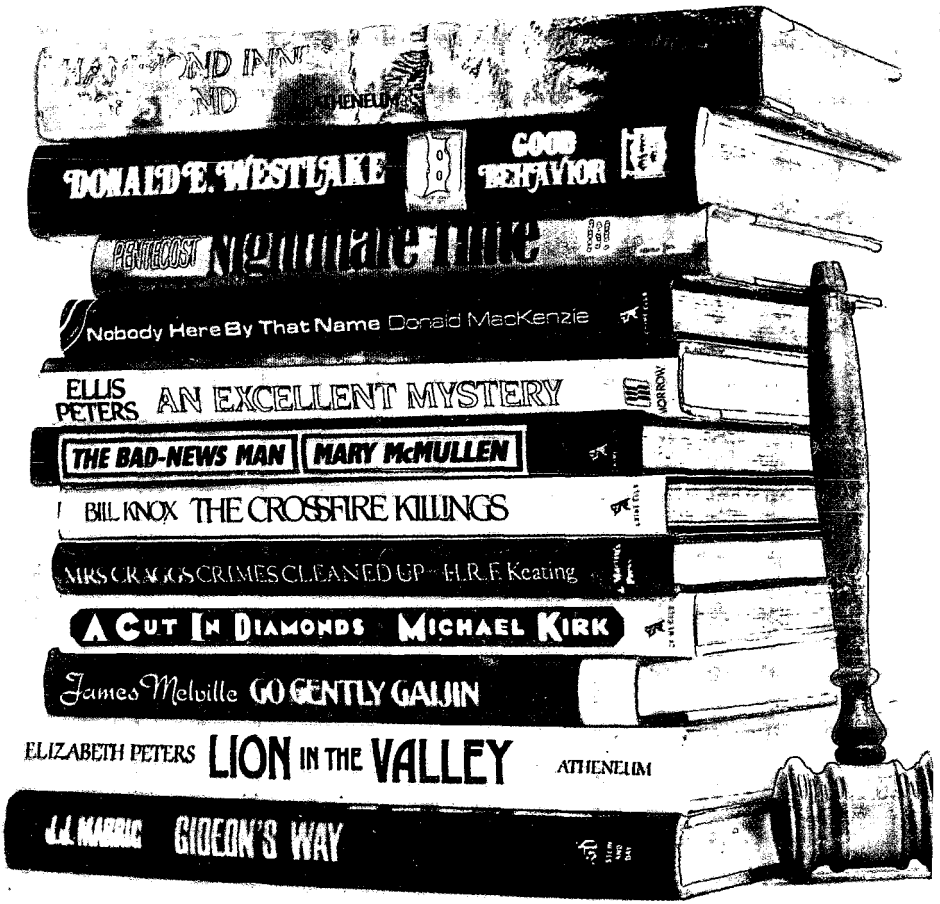
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